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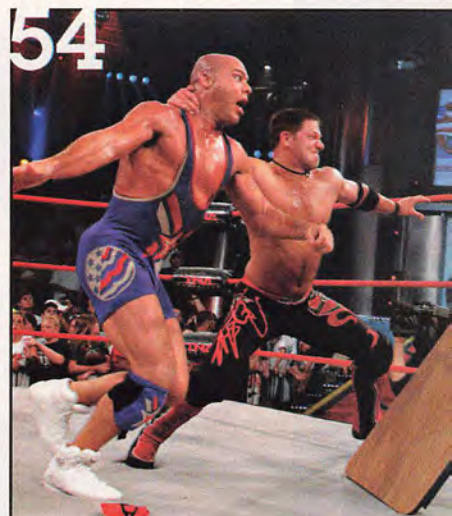
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YOUR LETTERS



The ramifications of TNA's "Makeover Battle Royal" at Sacrifice involved a lot more than Roxxi Laveaux losing her hair. Fans like Daphne Bowen lost respect not only for Cornette, but also for Gail Kim.

HAIR-BRAINED

All hail Queen Liz! I felt that her harsh criticism of Jim Cornette was just and well-deserved ("On Assignment," Volume 23, 2008). As a woman, I know that a female's hair is a very important possession, and I must say that Roxxi should be commended for her strength. If I were in her position, I wouldn't have allowed it.

Along with the loss of the "Voodoo Queen's" hair came my loss of respect for Jim Cornette and Gail Kim. I

had all the respect in the world for both, but with Sacrifice's "Makeover Battle Royal," that respect vanished. Cornette could have ruled the match a no-contest due to Angelina's involvement, and Gail could have thrown the match. I know it would have cost her the title shot, but with her talent, she would have gotten that shot again anyway. Jim and Gail's actions ruined the remainder of the pay-per-view for me. My interest totally evaporated.

For Roxxi and Liz, I have the utmost respect and appreciation. Roxxi is a very talented woman who *will* be the Knockout champion. And Liz is not reluctant to speak her mind. More power to you, girls!

DAPHNE BOWEN
Magee, MS

TRIPS TRUMPS ANGLE

This is in regard to the totally obscene claim that Kurt Angle is the best wrestler in the business today ("Forget The Wife ... Forget The Skits ... Forget The Angles: This Man Is The Best Wrestler On The Planet," Volume 21, 2008). As far as being a pure wrestler, Angle is easily the best in the business. But pure wrestling skill won't take you to being the best of all time in this business. To be the best, a wrestler has to have unmatched

microphone skills, be able to portray heel and face characters, and, most importantly, be able to carry the entire company on his back.

The one and only person that should come to mind is Triple-H. He is on top of the best organization in the world, WWE. Also, Triple-H is a grand slam-champion and an 11-time world champion, and he helped create the best era in wrestling: the Attitude Era. These reasons alone should be more than enough to have Triple-H rec-

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BRINT LARGENT
Hutchinson, KS

SICK OF VICK

I enjoy WWE's Monday Night Raw, but I do not enjoy Friday Night Smackdown because of the way Vickie Guerrero treats most of the wrestlers and has her boys cheat so they can win. I was very upset [on June 20] when Batista won his match and Vickie sent her boys in to beat him up. I think she needs to be fired for the way she treats people, and we need Teddy Long back.

MARGARET ARMIT
Sumner, WA

MY WWE NETWORK

In the Volume 22, 2008, issue of *The Wrestler/Inside Wrestling*, the "Point/Counterpoint" topic caught my attention. I personally have a lot of faith in the move to MyNetwork-TV. The most promising factor is WWE's strong support of Smackdown during this fragile time. The June draft proved that the blue brand is not necessarily WWE's "B" brand. Not only did Triple-H move from Raw to help strengthen Smackdown, but so did other big stars like Jeff Hardy and Ken Kennedy, and the former voice of Raw, Jim Ross. With that kind of support, I don't know how Smackdown won't succeed on MyNetwork-TV. I know I'll be watching.

BRAD WEISS
Topeka, KS

LEGACY KILLER

I read "Point/Counterpoint" (Volume 23, 2008), and I agree with Liz Hunter. Chris Benoit is the O.J. Simpson of wrestling. Benoit may have given the fans their money's worth, but after he killed his poor wife, son, and then

himself, none of the other things mean diddlysquat. After the tragedy, I lost my respect for Benoit, no matter how talented a wrestler he was.

NED BRYNE
Weymouth, MA □



When *THE WRESTLER* proclaimed that Kurt Angle the best wrestler in the sport, we expected plenty of rebuttal. Reader Brint Largent offers Triple-H as the man he believes should hold the honor.

WHAT'S HAPPENING



While the recent WWE draft lottery played out well for some superstars, Jim Ross was none too pleased to be sent from Raw to Smackdown. After some initial grumbling, J.R. accepted his new assignment.

FOR THE THIRD time in four years, World heavy-weight champion **Edge** was involved in an impromptu "Money In The Bank" ambush. Unfortunately for the "Rated-R Superstar," this time he was the victim of an unexpected challenge.

Edge, a Smackdown mainstay, made a surprise appearance on the June 30 Raw, one week after the WWE draft. His sole purpose was to gloat that the lottery had left WWE's flagship brand without a world champ. What Edge could not have predicted was **Batista**'s presence. The "Animal" fell short in his bid to win the title the night before at the Night of Champions pay-per-view.

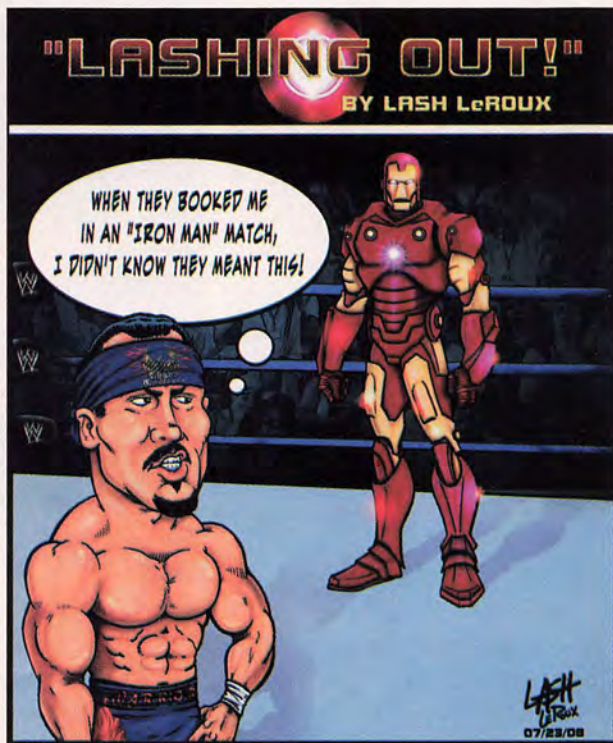
After Batista knocked Edge unconscious, "Money In

The Bank" holder **C.M. Punk** rushed to the ring and delivered a GTS to pin Edge for the title. Luckily for the brand, Punk had been drafted to Raw the week before. Now the Raw brand has a World champ, which should keep things interesting on Monday nights going forward.

Naturally, the draft fallout was not quite so favorable for all WWE talent. In the hours after Raw went off the air on June 23, longtime announcer **Jim Ross** found himself at a professional crossroads. Earlier in the night, the lead Raw play-by-play man had been drafted away from his preferred position alongside **Jerry Lawler**, a friend and colleague of more than 12 years, to join the relatively inexperienced **Mick Foley** on Smackdown.

Fans of "Good Ol'" J.R. around the world had to be surprised by the announcement, but certainly nobody looked more surprised than Ross himself. Even though a visibly stunned J.R. immediately announced he would take the move in stride, his face left many wondering whether this would be true. Many wondered if they were hearing Ross at the announcer's desk for the last time.

In a subsequent blog posted on his personal website the next day, Ross expressed his frustration with WWE executives for allowing the move—which he believed



to be a demotion—and recounted the soul searching he had done the night before about whether or not to quit the company.

One day later, he was at the keyboard again. This time he apologized for his heated words and expressed optimism that he could help make Smackdown the dominant WWE brand.

But why the sudden change in attitude? Was it the prospect of living life without the job he loves, or maybe a meeting with **Vince McMahon** or a call from friend and new partner Foley? Maybe it was a conversation with former-partner Lawler, who could have begged Ross not make the same mistake he once did when he briefly walked out on WWE.

Whichever the case, fans of Smackdown—and WWE in general—have to be glad Ross has embraced his new assignment and will remain at the announcer's position.

Meanwhile, one of TNA's newest female wrestlers, **Mickie Knuckles**, faces a long and difficult road back to competition after suffering a broken femur during an IWA: Mid-South match in early-July. According to eyewitness accounts, Knuckles attempted a high-risk dive from an elevated platform onto opponent **Sara Del Ray**. Unfortunately, Knuckles landed with all of her weight on one leg and suffered a grotesque break above the knee that shocked the fans in attendance.

Those unfortunate enough to witness the injury are comparing it to the one **Sid Vicious** suffered in his match against **Scott Steiner** at the 2001 WCW Sin pay-per-view.

While there's never a good time to suffer such a devastating and painful injury, the timing couldn't have been worse for Knuckles, who had been introduced in TNA as **Moose** just weeks before. Moose was beginning to make inroads in her new home after defeating **ODB** and **Roxxi Laveaux** in her first two *Impact* matches. We wish her a speedy and successful recovery.

WWE surprised many fans when it released popular wrestler (and crooner) **Trevor Murdoch** days before he was to have made his Smackdown debut.

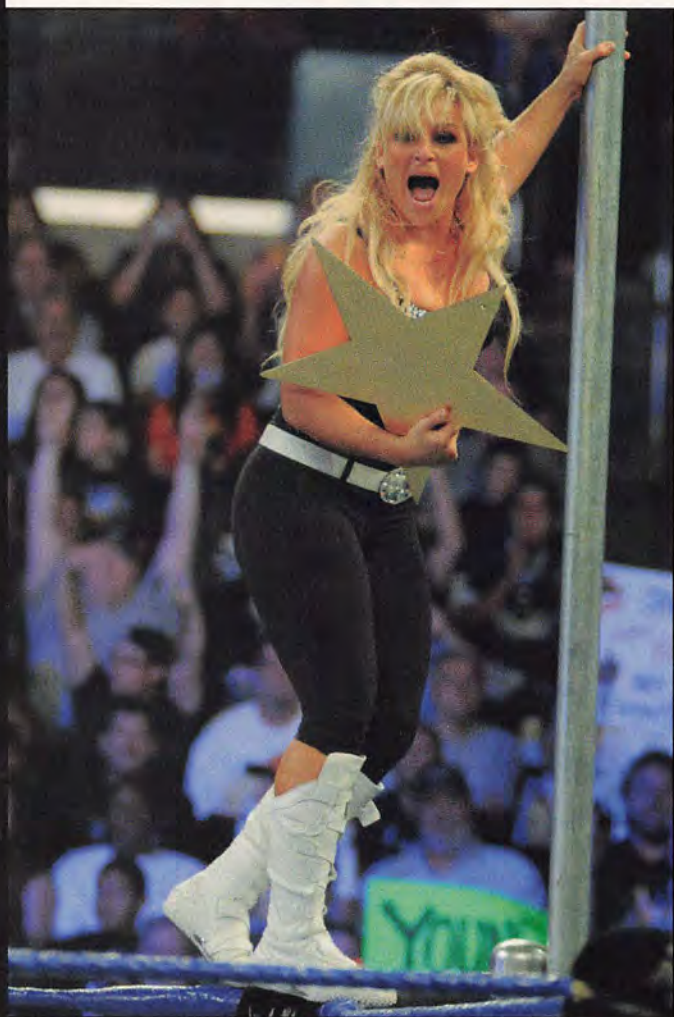
Murdoch, a former tag team champion on Raw, was well liked by his peers. And despite being drafted to a different brand, fans had been

holding out hope that he would find a way to gain revenge against former partner **Lance Cade**, who assaulted him following a match on Raw just a few weeks earlier. With Murdoch out of the picture, Cade apparently gets a free pass for the attack.

Smackdown Divas finally have something of their own to get excited about: a Diva championship title. So far, competition for the new strap has been between **Natalya** and **Michelle McCool**, who came away with the strap at the Great American Bash.



Whether it's as Moose or Mickie Knuckles, wrestling fans won't be seeing this mega-tough competitor for quite some time. Knuckles recently suffered a severe leg injury while competing for the indy group IWA: Mid-South.



Natalya may think she's Smackdown's true female star, but it was Michelle McCool who won the brand new Divas title at The Great American Bash.

For weeks, the ladies had been battling in one of the brand's most pitched feuds over what seems to be a case of professional jealousy.

Natalya, a third-generation wrestler, was immersed in wrestling her entire life. Many feel she resents the positive attention McCool, a former Diva Search competitor and virtual wrestling neophyte, receives from the fans each week. Fans should expect the grudge to get even hotter as Natalya, a fiery competitor, is unlikely to take McCool's latest success in good nature.

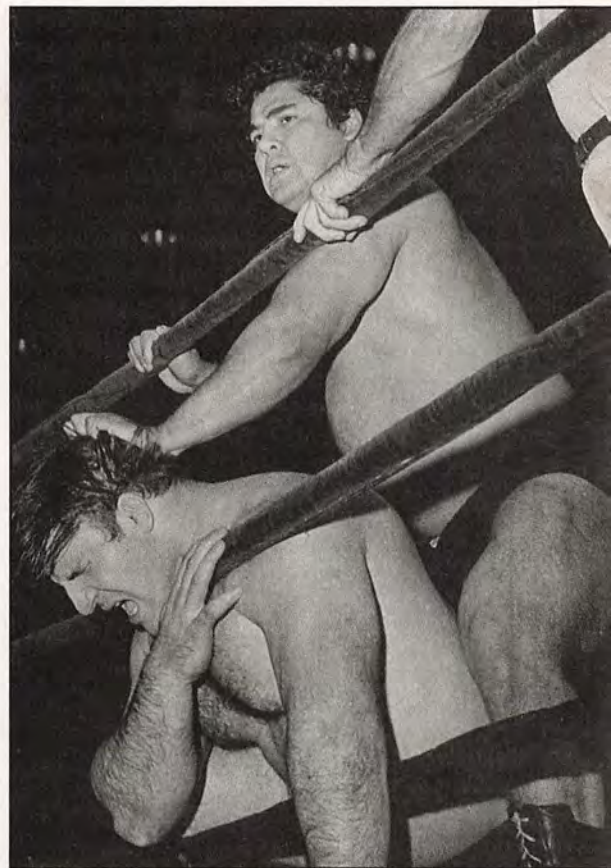
The creation of yet another women's title for a major wrestling brand has to bode well for the future of ladies' wrestling in North America. Let's just hope there are no imminent plans to have the new title defended exclusively in pudding.

The creation of yet another women's title for a major wrestling brand has to bode well for the future of ladies' wrestling in North America. Let's just hope there are no imminent plans to have the new title defended exclusively in pudding.

The wrestling community has suffered several losses recently. Cancer took the life of 66-year-old **Masatake Kusatsu**, a Japanese competitor once labeled "**The Great Kusatsu**." After competing for Japan's national rugby team, Kusatsu made the jump to professional wrestling in 1966 with stints in the now-defunct promotions Japan Pro Wrestling Association (JWA) and International Wrestling Enterprise (IWE). Perhaps more than any of his other accomplishments, The Great Kusatsu might best be remembered for his knockout loss to **Lou Thesz** in a 1968 inter-promotional match-up.

Also lost was 83-year-old **Ricky "The Crusher" Cortez**, a former bodybuilder and wrestler who died of a massive heart attack. Cortez was a mainstay in Detroit throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He was best known for his feud with an emerging young athlete from Pittsburgh named **Bruno Sammartino**.

Wrestling legend **Curt Hennig**, who died February 10, 2003, will be remembered with the September release of a retrospective on "Mr. Perfect." WWE has released the cover art for the two-disc DVD set *The Life and Times of Mr. Perfect*. Given the high quality of WWE documentaries in recent years, Hennig's fans have a lot to be excited about. □



Ricky "The Crusher" Cortez gets the upper hand on Bruno Sammartino in this 1961 bout at the Olympia in Detroit. Cortez, who battled Sammartino often in Bruno's early career, died of a heart attack at age 83 on May 16.

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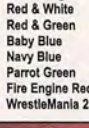
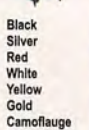


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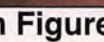
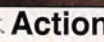
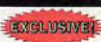
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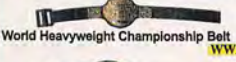
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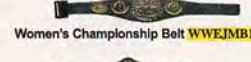
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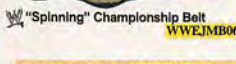
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WWEPENDANT52



[K R E W - C U T S]

BY FRANK KREWDA

WWE NOTES. World champion C.M. Punk likes to call himself the "Straightedge Superstar," but the longer his championship reign goes on, the more I have to question the legitimacy of that nickname. On a July episode of Raw, Punk told John Bradshaw Layfield he doesn't want to be known as a champion who retains the title through cheap means. Funny, but he didn't seem to mind *winning* the title through cheap means when he rushed the ring to pin Edge, who was beaten to a pulp by Batista minutes before. Nor did he seem to mind manning up to Batista later in the same episode after Kane wiped him out with a chokeslam ... Perhaps the only thing less impressive than Colin Delaney's

wrestling is his decision making. Delaney recently made the bold choice to turn against his mentor, Tommy Dreamer, and align himself with Mark Henry and Tony Atlas. That choice is destined blow up in his face. The only reason the once-lovable doormat even secured a roster spot in ECW is because Dreamer reached out and guided him. Colin claims he ditched Dreamer because he represents the past while Henry represents the future. Apparently, the future holds a rewarding bellhop position for Delaney, who's already offered to carry Henry's and Atlas' bags to and from arenas ... One has to wonder who Beth Phoenix ticked off. Back in April, her reign as dominant women's champion came to an

inexplicable halt. Then she turns up a few months later in an equally inexplicable love-fest with Santino Marella. Maybe amidst all the *amore*, she can show Marella a thing or two about wrestling ... Ever wonder how Smackdown became WWE's "secondary" brand? I have. Of course, there was the obvious lack of star power that plagued the brand prior to the 2008 draft. But another critical factor has to be Smackdown's inability to elevate some of its mid-card talent. Granted, differentiating Curt Hawkins from Zack Ryder from Shannon Moore from Brian Kendrick from Jesse Dalton can't be easy, especially considering the gnat-sized attention span of today's wrestling fans. But after sitting through a three-hour taping, these wrestlers morph together into a faceless, 150-pound blur of blond hair. Unless WWE Creative gives these folks something that truly makes them stand out from each other, they can all expect a long stay on the mid-card. That satisfies nobody—not the wrestlers, not the brand, and certainly not the fans ... Congrats to Michelle McCool, who became the first WWE Divas champion when she defeated Natalya at The Great American Bash. I find it kind of curious that she'd get the nod over Natalya, who as a member of the Hart family probably has a better grasp on pro wrestling than most women on the WWE roster. Oddly enough, McCool got the win by escaping a sharpshooter before locking on her Brazilian heel hook submission hold. The fans in attendance at a recent Smackdown taping in Philadelphia voiced their opinion of the new champion during her match with Maryse.



Is C.M. Punk the kind of wrestler who says one thing, but does another? Managing Editor Frank Krewda says all you have to do is consider how he won the WWE World title to find the answer.

Several fans suggested at full voice that McCool's title win was the result of her reported relationship with The Undertaker and not her superior wrestling ability. Fans were also calling for the "real" Divas champ, Natalya, to come out and take the title from McCool. Natalya was in the house, but chose to stay behind the scenes ... When Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr. ran down Jim Duggan on a recent Raw, I had to laugh. DiBiase lampooned "Hacksaw" for running out the same old gimmick after all these years in a pathetic attempt to get a reaction from the fans. The ironic thing was Duggan got an instant, effortless reaction the second he stepped from behind the curtain, while fans didn't react to DiBiase and Rhodes at all throughout the segment. Just more proof a wrestling pedigree means nothing if you can't connect with the fans. Rhodes and DiBiase Jr. may be skilled, talented workers, but Duggan, who's much more limited athletically at this point of his career, has more charisma than both youngsters combined.

TNA NOTES. Getting to see international wrestling stars in action is always a good thing in my book, so I had plenty of interest in this year's "World X Cup" tournament. But for fans who'd like to see wrestlers such as Averno, Doug Williams, or Naruki Doi on a more regular basis, the tourney is something of a tease. Due to talent-exchange agreements and other legal/political factors, many of these men remain in the States much too briefly. My advice to TNA is, rather than cramming overseas talent into an annual tournament, work harder at bringing these folks to TNA year round. TNA would still have plenty of talent on its own roster to hold an "X Cup" tournament. But instead of Teams Mexico, Japan, and International, it could feature "Team One-Bump-Away-From-Catastrophic-Injury." Kurt Angle, a veteran of at least half a dozen serious neck injuries could captain the squad. Scott Steiner, who's good for two surgeries a



Who's the fiery blonde who took the TNA Women's title from Awesome Kong? Don't ask TNA. Despite her recent accomplishments, TNA has yet to settle on a name for the impressive Knockout.

year these days and Kevin Nash, who's known to blow out a quad simply by taking a single step to his left or his right, would round out the team. We could also have "Team Annoying-Gimmick." Curry Man, Shark Boy, "Black Machismo" Jay Lethal, and Super Eric, all victims of TNA's comic stylings, would have a real chance to showcase their wrestling skills. "Team Indecision" would also compete. The members of this team—Sting, Abyss, Consequences Creed, and Tomko—will wrestle, or maybe not, here and there, until TNA Creative decides what to do with each of them ... On a related note, it probably wouldn't hurt TNA to settle on a name for its women's champion. Since her debut, TNA has referred to the effervescent dynamo that defeated Awesome Kong as Shantelle Taylor, Shantelle, Taylor, and Taylor Wilde. Even on its own website, tnawrestling.com, the company can't decide what to call her. In the TNA champions field, she's identified as Taylor. On the same page under TNA roster, she's called Taylor Wilde. Likewise, TNA quietly rechristened Moose as Moose Knuckles during her absence. I've never claimed to be a marketing genius, but I have to believe establishing these women as bankable commodities would be much easier if TNA at least got their names straight. □

ON ASSIGNMENT

A MAN'S LEGACY is all he truly has. Legacy is how we are remembered after we are gone. Legacy is how we have treated others, how we have performed, how we have behaved. It is what we have given back to the world, a summation of a lifetime of accomplishments. Our legacy is revealed, bit-by-bit, by how we react in the face of adversity, how we demonstrate grace, and how we exhibit professionalism.

Bret Hart, perhaps more than any wrestler of his era, has valued the legacy he will leave behind. "The best there is, the best there was, the best there ever will be." That has been Hart's credo, in both professional and personal matters.

Hart played the role of the villain many times in his wrestling career, but he always tried to do things the right way. He dedicated himself to becoming the best wrestler he could, to having the best match on the card, and being a gentleman outside of the ring.

That's why Hart is still so sensitive about the

Montreal Screwjob of 1997. It was important for him to not be humiliated by his arch-rival in front of the countrymen who earnestly believed in the values he strove to live up to. A cynic would say Hart was "a mark who believed in his own gimmick." In reality, I believe Hart simply had lofty ideals. He wanted his legacy to be unblemished.

That is why his actions at the George Tragos/Lou Thesz Hall of Fame induction ceremony were so deeply disappointing.

On June 28, Hart was on hand to induct his father, Stu, into the Hall of Fame, which honors pro wrestlers who have also had success in amateur wrestling. As a true student of the game, Bret was honored to be in the company of such luminaries as Red Bastien, Harley Race, Masa Saito, Larry Hennig, and he began a moving speech about how those wrestlers advanced the "art of wrestling."

Then Hart inexplicably veered off on a ridiculous tangent about "truth" in wrestling and launched into a verbal attack on Greg Oliver, the recipient of the Jim Melby Award for excellence in pro wrestling journalism (along with co-writer Steven Johnson).

Apparently, Hart was holding a grudge over Oliver's 2003 book *The Pro Wrestling Hall Of Fame: The Canadians*. That terrific book opened with a ranking of the top 20 Canadian wrestlers of all-time, as determined by Oliver and Johnson. Hart ranked number 14.

"I know this isn't my place to gripe about stuff, but I have a serious issue with people who write books about wrestling who don't honor the truth," Hart said (according to a transcript printed by another excellent wrestling journalist, Kevin Eck of the *Baltimore Sun*.) "And you, sir, you do not honor the truth of wrestling. Greg Oliver writes these books on wrestling and it's all made up. It's not the truth."

Hart went on to say that Oliver and writers like him didn't deserve to be in the same room as the wrestlers being honored.



Bret Hart had developed a great legacy over the years during his career as a wrestler. He had made his family and fans proud. His fans even honored him in 1994 with WWF's "Award Of The People." But since that unanticipated result at Survivor Series 1997, Bret has done a few things to tarnish his great name.

BY DAN MURPHY ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"They don't know anything about wrestling," he continued. "I've never seen them in the back. I've never seen them in the dressing room. I've never seen them at anything to do with wrestling. They don't know anything at all about my business."

Hart then went one step further, demanding that either Oliver leave the room or he would leave. Johnson and his wife got up to leave, but to his credit, Oliver didn't budge. Hart continued to ramble, and then let slip the real reason for his vendetta against Oliver.

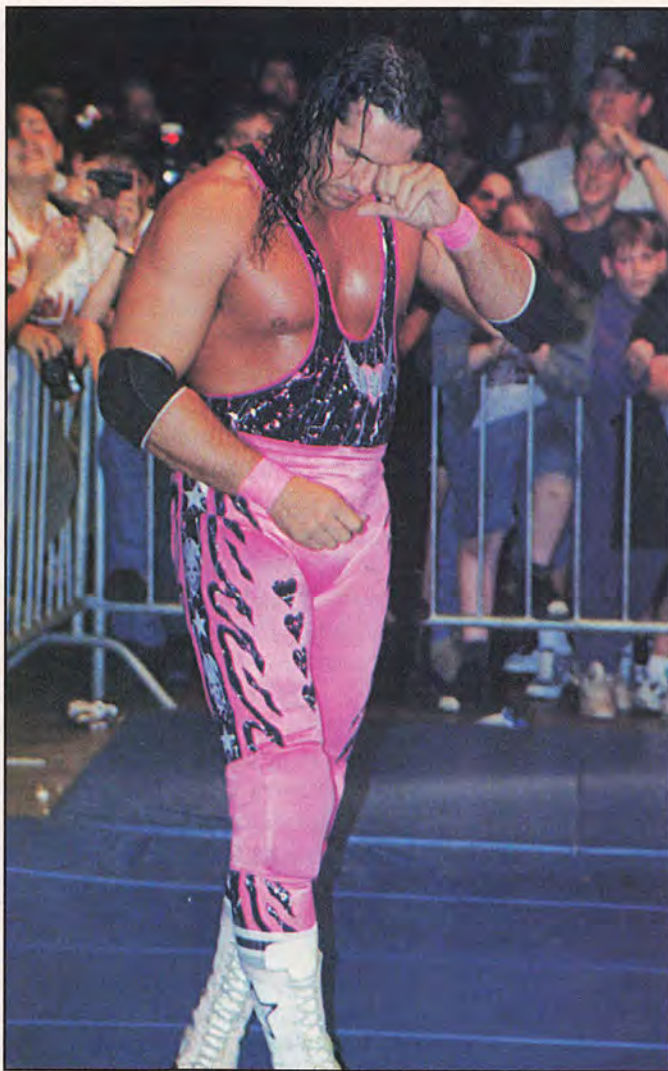
"It makes me laugh that Greg Oliver here rated me behind Sky Low Low, as, I think, the 13th greatest Canadian wrestler," Hart said. Hart reissued his ultimatum. Oliver remained planted in his seat and waved goodbye. When it became clear that Oliver was staying put, Hart stormed out of the event.

I have known Greg Oliver for five years now. Apparently, I have one up on Hart, because I *have* seen him backstage. In fact, one might say the reason Hart hasn't seen writers like Oliver in the dressing room is because Bret hasn't been in a pro wrestling locker room in seven years *himself*, except for a handful of autograph signings on the indy circuit.

The Tragos/Thesz Hall of Fame suffered some severe damage in the recent floods in Iowa. If Hart really cared as much about "the art" of wrestling and "the truth" of wrestling history, maybe he could have concentrated his remarks on the wonderful job the museum is doing and solicited donations on the museum's behalf. Instead, he stood up in front of a roomful of people and aired a personal grudge against a journalist, and a damn good journalist at that.

Oliver traveled from Ontario to Iowa to receive a prestigious award. It should have been a very special evening for him and his family. Instead, Hart tried to humiliate him.

Even if Hart had reason to be angry about his ranking, or any other grudge with Oliver, he should have done the respectful thing and discussed it with



At an event meant to honor his own father and other men of the sport, Bret chose to berate and embarrass a journalist against whom he had a personal vendetta. Senior Writer Dan Murphy thinks such actions prove Hart has become little more than a whining bully.

Oliver face-to-face. Instead, he tried to cut a wrestling promo on an unsuspecting writer.

It pains me to say this, but ever since Montreal, Hart has come off like a whining, self-important ass. This latest incident represents a new low.

Bret, you might have been "the best there was" as a wrestler, but it is obvious that you have become a petty, insecure bully. Like it or not, that just might be your true legacy.

(Liz Hunter is on vacation)

□

[T H U M B S U P]

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling



Thumbs Up to Kevin Nash. Is there anyone who didn't think Nash's role as TNA mentor was disingenuous or that it wouldn't be short-lived? Surprise, surprise! As Nash became more of an integral factor in TNA throughout the summer, those backstage segments lost their silliness. Now, "Big Kev" has rekindled an old feud with Booker T and seems destined to challenge Samoa Joe for the World title at some point. Serving as elder statesman of TNA seemed to fuel "Big Sexy's" fire and had him, once again, contemplating one more run at glory. A focused Nash is still a great thing to watch.

Thumbs Up to Kofi Kingston. For every five Zombies ECW has cranked out in its history, there seems to be one feel-good story the likes of Kingston. The former indy grappler debuted with ECW in January 2008 and immediately gained a loyal following through pre-taped vignettes. Once he received the chance to

prove his mettle in the ring, Kingston lived up to the hype. By the end of June, the Jamaican had not only made the move to Raw, but he also captured the Intercontinental championship as the surprise opponent of then-champ Chris Jericho at Night of Champions.



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Thumbs Up to Jim Ross. Nobody was more surprised on June 23 than J.R. himself when it was announced on Raw that he'd been traded to Smackdown in the 2008 WWE Draft. The look on Ross' face when he got the news spoke volumes on how he felt about moving to the blue brand. And, in case anyone had any doubts, Ross confirmed his feelings with an acerbic post on his blog the next day. When faced with the new assignment, Ross actually considered resigning from WWE. Thankfully, through, J.R. cooled down and decided to embrace the new mission with enthusiasm and professionalism. Smackdown and WWE will no doubt benefit from Ross' change of heart.



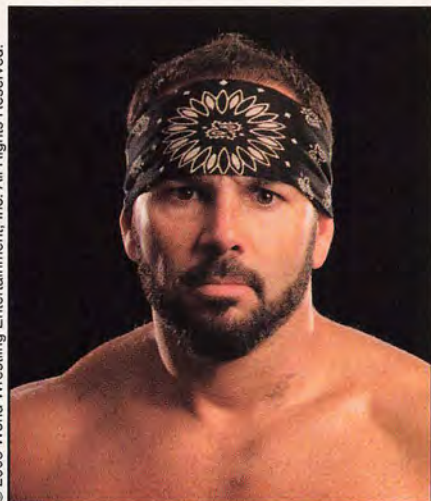
Thumbs Up to Mark Henry. It took more than a decade, but the "World's Strongest Man" finally captured singles championship gold at WWE's Night of Champions when he capitalized on an

injured Kane to win the ECW title in a three-way match. Henry's only title reign came in 1999 when he briefly held the WWF European championship, which he was *given* by then-Intercontinental champ Jeff Jarrett. That means the ECW title victory at Night of Champions was technically the first time in his career that the "World's Strongest Man" actually *won* gold, which must have made the experience that much sweeter for him.



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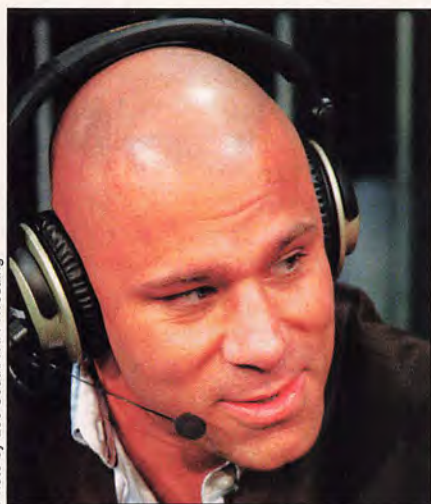
[T H U M B S D O W N]



Thumbs Down to Chavo Guerrero Jr. Despite his shortcomings—and there have been many—there was always hope that Chavo would wake up and recognize the damage being done to his family's good name. But, sadly, the former ECW champion appears content with playing the lackey role to Edge and Vickie Guerrero. Meanwhile, Junior is defiling the legacy his family worked so hard to create. His way of accomplishing things may not be entirely on the up-and-up, but to relegate himself to sidekick status is just sad ... and disrespectful to his relatives.

Thumbs Down to Cody Rhodes. Dusty's son must have broken his father's heart when he chose to turn against mentor Hardcore Holly at WWE's Night of Champions and side with Ted

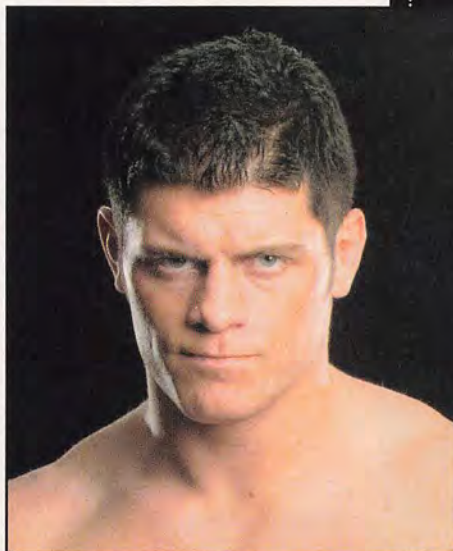
DiBiase Jr. Dusty began his career as a heel and saw the error of his ways. The remainder of his career was exemplary. One would have thought—or at least hoped—some of that integrity would have trickled down to his younger son. Alas, one son parades around with face paint and a rat while the other proved to the world that, well, he's just a rat. There were such high hopes for Cody and Holly. It's a shame to see it end as suddenly, and painfully, as it did.



Thumbs Down to Frank Trigg. It stands to reason that Trigg would align himself with Kurt Angle in TNA. But to immediately stoop down to the former-champion's depths is disappointing to see. Trigg not only directed his ire toward A.J. Styles—Angle's main nemesis earlier this summer—but he did so in the hopes that Kurt's hired goons would be able to get their hands on his estranged wife, Karen. It's one thing to align yourself with someone of questionable character, but it's something entirely different when you do so to help him injure his wife.

Thumbs Down to Davey Richards. This ROH standout spent a fair amount of time wrestling in Japan this summer, and for good reason. His cowardly

actions at June's "Respect Is Earned II" PPV taping in Philadelphia left ROH fans (and some wrestlers) seething. After Roderick Strong had just defeated Erick Stevens in a brutal 45-minute "Fight Without Honor" hardcore match, Richards entered the ring and tried to con his former friend into joining Larry Sweeney's Sweet 'n' Sour Inc. When a spent Strong declined, Richards physically attacked him and left Strong lying in the ring. Davey then removed his shirt to reveal a Sweet 'n' Sour Inc. shirt underneath.



P O I N T:

"MILLION-DOLLAR MANIA" WAS A BRILLIANT CONCEPT

BY BILL MELTZER

BLASTING WWE FOR its short-lived "Million-Dollar Mania" concept would be akin to bashing billionaire Richard Branson's vast Virgin empire for the tycoon's journey across the Atlantic Ocean in a hot-air balloon. It's a classic case of not seeing the forest for the trees.

Publicity stunts are as old as time itself and, when done effectively, are not only harmless, but can go a long way toward actually helping a product by generating new interest in it. That was the case with WWE's recent money giveaway.

It was clear from the outset that WWE's intention was never to artificially inflate viewership by "buying off fans" with the lure of cash prizes. Rather, the contest—which coincided with a media blitz that landed McMahon on the *Today* show among other places—was only a part of a much larger plan to spark interest in WWE just in time for the company to launch a major initiative to refresh its product.

What's more, it worked. Raw's ratings jumped from a 3.0 in the first week of the contest to a 3.3 in its second week, then to a 3.7 for the three-hour June 23 Raw where the contest wrapped up.

Along the way, WWE welcomed new viewers with video packages introducing them to the WWE product, and "Did You Know?" factoids that offered revealing insights into WWE's massive appeal.

It all led up to that final week of the contest—you know, the one that essentially turned the wrestling universe on its ear.

Starting on the June 23 edition of Raw, and lasting through the following Sunday's Night of Champions pay-per-view and the following night's Raw, WWE rocked the wrestling world by creating new stars, crowning new champions, and reconstituting the lineups of three brands. Jim Ross moved to Smackdown, Michael Cole to Raw, Triple-H and his WWE heavyweight championship moved to Smackdown, Batista switched to Raw, Kofi Kingston was crowned Intercontinental champion, a hot new tag team act in Cody Rhodes and Ted DiBiase Jr. formed, and last but not least, C.M. Punk won the World heavyweight championship from Edge and moved it to Raw.

Also, the controversial contest itself ended not with a whimper, but with a bang—quite literally. The sight of McMahon being buried under the collapsed Raw set after giving away his final \$500,000 made for some riveting television, and sparked even more interest in an already compelling wrestling show.

McMahon's "Million-Dollar Mania" may have been flawed, but it was most certainly not a failure. WWE was able to reel in viewers with the carrot of a prize giveaway, then keep them watching by offering new stars, fresh storylines, and thrilling action. Indeed, Raw's ratings remained in the mid-three range for two weeks after the contest.

Sacrificing a few minutes of television time over the course of only three weeks was a small price to pay to kickstart WWE into an exciting new era.

Bill Meltzer is a contributing writer for *THE WRESTLER*.



Photo by George Napolitano

For Vince McMahon, "Million-Dollar Mania" was just part of a bigger plan to increase brand recognition. Contributing Writer Bill Meltzer feels the campaign was a smart way to attract more fans to WWE.

C O U N T E R P O I N T :

"MILLION-DOLLAR MANIA" WAS A DESPERATE ACT

BY AL CASTLE

DO YOU REMEMBER back in 1985 when figure-head WWE President Jack Tunney lured millions of new wrestling fans with the promise of giving away \$1-million—launching a huge revenue boon and a WWE-themed Saturday morning cartoon along the way?

How about the 1997 WWE money giveaway that led to another big upsurge in business that ushered in the so-called "Attitude" era?

Of course not, because neither ever happened. Yet, as absurd as it was to think that a sweepstakes could be the answer to reversing 10-year low television ratings and launching WWE's next hot business streak, that was just the notion Vince McMahon had in mind with the now ill-fated "Million-Dollar Mania."

Not only did the concept not work, but it also had the damaging effect of portraying McMahon—and WWE as a whole—as so desperate to reel in viewers that they quite literally resorted to buying them. As such, the contest was not only offensive to fans, but it was doomed to fail from the start.

Still, some WWE defenders might argue that the contest should never have been judged on its own merits, but rather as a tool to spark interest in WWE, bring back some departed fans, and create some new ones. They are all logical goals for a wrestling promotion, but since when are they accomplished by paying fans to watch?

The only carrot a wrestling promoter should need to draw fans is a good wrestling product. In the mid-1980s, McMahon revolutionized wrestling by thinking outside the box with concepts such as *WrestleMania*, "Hulkamania," and the "Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection." VKM did it in the mid-1990s as well by trading in wrestlers with stale, boring gimmicks for cutting-edge acts like "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, The Rock, and DeGeneration X.

Even failed concepts, like the early-'90s' "New Generation" were at least based on providing a better wrestling product. McMahon's "Million-Dollar Mania" accomplished quite the opposite, taking valuable time from rising stars like Ken Kennedy and Paul Burchall—who were given all of three bouts as build-up for their anticipated grudge match—while Vince fumbled through the complicated process of dialing a telephone. Those segments could have been put to much better use.

As poor as "Million-Dollar Mania" was in its concept, it was an even bigger flop in its execution. Over the three weeks that fans were made to suffer through the tedious segments, McMahon got numerous busy signals and misdials and cut-off winners before the TV audience could get the payoff of hearing them celebrate. He even once forgot his own winning password. The fans in attendance and at home sat on their hands and groaned. Hardly great television.

In a business that has struggled for years with a negative mainstream perception, it is imperative that wrestling promoters do everything possible to make their product seem "cool" and relevant—a destination for fans of athleticism and entertainment to seek out each week.

Even in its relatively short life span, "Million-Dollar Mania" caused untold damage to the sport by making WWE seem anything but hip. Rather, WWE portrayed itself as clueless, panicked, and downright desperate for attention.

Al Castle is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER. □



The creation and promotion of phenomena such as "Hulkamania" created genuine fan interest in professional wrestling and the WWF. Contributing Writer Al Castle says "paying" fans to watch WWE was a desperate and cheap attempt at creating buzz.

INTRODUCING

TAYLOR WILDE



THE LOOK OF shock on Taylor Wilde's face after she defeated Awesome Kong for the TNA women's title told a story that she might not be willing to verbalize. She didn't have any idea that match would turn out as positively it did.

"I wouldn't say that, not exactly," she said, modeling the belt that looks a heck of a lot better on her slim 115-pound frame than it did her monstrous 273-pound predecessor. "It doesn't really matter anyway. I dared to dream a dream, and that dream came true. And no matter what happens, nobody can take that away from me."

The fulfillment of the dream, Wilde will admit, didn't exactly go as planned. She made her TNA debut answering Kong's \$25,000 challenge to any adult female fan willing to risk her health for the opportunity to defeat perhaps the most physically imposing woman wrestler ever. Taylor volunteered three times before she was actually selected by Kong and her manager, Raisha Saeed.

"Sitting there and watching the other women get slaughtered was really hard on me," Wilde said. "I was afraid Kong would get bored with the concept before I'd get my chance."

Taylor knew she would have the opportunity to make a run at the title in the traditional way: sign a contract and fight her way through a maze of other challengers. But she preferred the element of surprise because Taylor knew something about herself that Kong did not—she was not some masochistic woman who was looking for 15 minutes (or seconds) of fame. She was a trained professional with international experience who, if taken lightly (which was probable under the circumstances), actually had a chance of winning.

"My heart was racing, I thought it was going to explode, and it was all happening so fast," Wilde recalls. "But I've been training my whole life for this, and I knew it was an opportunity that never, ever comes along. I had no choice but to take it."

When she lost the match after a courageous struggle, she feared that she might have lost her psychological edge. "At that point, she knew that I was a wrestler," Wilde said. "But I didn't get a chance to show her everything I had. I knew if I was able to get another shot at her, I still had a chance."

Taylor got that second opportunity by virtue of a win over Saeed, and this time she made the most of it, rolling Kong up in a small package for the victory and the belt.

"It was the greatest moment of my life," Wilde said. "It was overwhelming! I was shocked, happy, scared, petrified ... every single emotion that could happen happened. I've been training since I was 17 and I wanted to get in the ring and learn as much as I could and make a career, and I couldn't even dream of making it to this point."

She actually made it beyond that point, beating Kong once

BY RUSSELL JAFFE ■■■■■■■■■■

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

again at the Victory Road pay-per-view.

Though Wilde is new to TNA and to the fans, the young champion has worked her way through smaller independents, like Pure Wrestling Association in Ontario, growing women's indy promotion SHIMMER, and WWE's now-defunct developmental territory Deep South Wrestling. There, Taylor gained early insight into why WWE's women's division is so much different than TNA's.

"The WWE developmental system has changed women's wrestling for WWE," she said. "The first thing that comes to mind when you think of TNA women's wrestling is diversity. Knockouts have so many different flavors of girls—short, tall, different weight classes, and racial backgrounds. And it makes for much more of an interesting division, even wrestling aside. WWE has come to a point where they have a lot of models, and they're clean-cut and cookie cutter-esque. There are only a few girls in developmental, and you can't work outside your territory. Their ability to get experience outside of five girls is lacking. Everyone picks up the same skills, and it all goes back to diversity. TNA Knockouts are girls I've seen travel the world and have a lot of experience, and it shows in the ring."

Taylor herself has traveled the world, from her home in Calgary, Alberta, to Georgia's Deep South to a summer wrestling in Monterrey, Mexico, where she learned the lucha style. She even went to South Africa for a major wrestling event that boasted many TNA stars, including Kevin Nash and Scott Steiner. Ultimately, she was given a tryout with WWE, but she was not signed.

Wilde wants the fans to know that it's a new day in TNA. She has a great passion for professional wrestling and for building a legacy in the ring. But while Taylor was the women's champion as this issue went to press, she insists that she has yet to show the fans her full potential. She defeated Kong for the belt with a surprise rollup pin, and retained it after countering a potentially devastating power bomb into a quick victory roll. "I want to prove to the fans that it wasn't a fluke," she says, "and I want to make them all proud. I can see any of the women in that locker room as my next opponent; I'd be proud to take on any of them."

This is not the first time in recent memory a supposed fan who just happened to have a wrestling background hopped into the ring and found themselves sporting the gold. In 2007, Italian "fan" Santino Marella found himself on the receiving end of an Umaga challenge and



TNA newcomer Taylor Wilde relied on her training to unseat the seemingly indomitable Awesome Kong as women's champion. Despite her early success in TNA, Wilde says she's committed to continual improvement in the ring.

subsequent beatdown, until Bobby Lashley speared the Intercontinental champion, laid Marella across him, and made WWE title history. "Timing is important," Taylor said, "but also it just shows that basically how hard you work and no matter your size or how much experience you have, if you have your eye on the prize, anything can happen. The Knockouts division is spontaneous. Anything can happen! Kong held it for almost six months, but now it shows that not one person can hold it. Everyone has a chance. It's always up in the air."

For a passionate champion with so much good to say about her company's women's division, much about Taylor is still shrouded in mystery. She defeated Saeed with a bridging German suplex and showed tenacity in earning her title shot, but she has yet to debut any signature moves. What is next for Taylor Wilde, the very young, very driven TNA women's champion?

"I'm working on developing moves and counters, and learning from all the talented women in the TNA locker room," she replied. "Honestly, I just am savoring the moment, but I'm not letting my guard down. I've been getting in the ring training in Toronto, making sure I stay sharp. I don't like to look too much into the future, but then again, I have dreamed of this my entire life." □

WORKING

BY AL CASTLE

A Change In Styles

For a professional wrestler, perhaps the only thing worse than being cast in a dead-end role is being good in it. That's been the case for A.J. Styles, who for more than a year played the part of a dimwitted lackey—first for Christian Cage and later for Kurt Angle.

Because TNA never really explored A.J.'s personality nor gave him much time behind a microphone, it was easy to justify putting Styles in the comedy role as a form of "character development."

For longtime fans of the "Phenomenal One," it must have been frustrating to see a former world champion and a world-class talent reduced to silly skits that featured him wearing a turkey costume, locking himself in his childhood bedroom, and relishing a visit to Gator World. Yet, as lame as the humor often was, Styles somehow made it work.

At long last, though, it seems Styles has finally escaped the country bumpkin routine and embraced an edgier, more serious role in TNA. Hopefully, Styles will take advantage of the speaking and performing skills he's developed over the past year and use them to develop a character more befitting his magnificent gifts.

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

Call the police! Someone has stolen my WWE and replaced it with an innovative, forward-thinking wrestling product!

After having Triple-H and Randy Orton square off six times in 10 pay-per-views and The Undertaker vs. Edge four times in six pay-per-views, nobody could deny WWE was in desperate need of a shakeup. But not even the most optimistic fans could have predicted the sweeping changes WWE would make over a single week in June.

To its credit, WWE switched scads of top-tier talent among brands during its annual draft lottery. Jim Ross became the voice of Smackdown, and Michael Cole the voice of Raw. Ted DiBiase Jr. and Cody Rhodes won the World tag team championship. Lance Cade got involved in the Chris Jericho-Shawn Michaels feud. Jamaican upstart Kofi Kingston won the Intercontinental championship. And, last but not least, C.M. Punk became the World heavyweight champion.

Kudos to WWE, which sensed what its fans wanted and responded in kind, rather than staying a course that had grown stale and yielded disappointing ratings.

Pro wrestling's boon periods have always been the fruit of risky decisions, new ideas, and, most of all, change.

Ring Of Dishonor

With all due respect to Adam Pearce, I was a little disappointed to hear he retained his NWA heavyweight championship with a disqualification win in a title-vs.-title match against ROH champion Nigel McGuinness in June.

Since its inception in 2002, ROH has grown to embody much of what the National Wrestling Alliance stood for during its glory days—sportsmanship, respect, and tradition.



If anything can take the "comedy" out of wrestling, it's trading maneuvers with Kurt Angle. Contributing Writer Al Castle applauds A.J. Styles' return to the serious side of TNA.

But what ROH still doesn't have is a heavy-weight championship with much history.

It would seem that a marriage between the most honored wrestling championship in the sport's history and the American wrestling promotion that prides itself on being all about "honor" would make a lot of sense, and perhaps push ROH over the edge in achieving legitimate world title status.

Like Father, Like Son ... Or Daughter

Long past the time my two older brothers' fascination with wrestling waned at the end of the 1980s, my love for the sport thrived. But, growing up, it was rare for the members of my family to do very much individually. So despite my childhood ambivalence toward baseball, I was still dragged to the Yankee Stadium bleachers nearly every week because the other members of the Castle clan were diehard fans. Looking back, it would have been easy for my father to dismiss my solitary enthusiasm for pro wrestling, as most others did. But he did not.

In 1990, when then-WWF champion Ultimate Warrior came to town to team with Kerry Von Erich against Rick Rude and Curt Hennig, I was desperate to go. But begging was not necessary. My dad, who emigrated to New York from his native Nicaragua more than 50 years ago, spent an entire afternoon driving around unfamiliar streets on Long Island looking for a Ticketmaster location where he could score some seats. He did, and we had a great time.

Years later, my father's jewelry store went under, and my family struggled to survive. My father, a skilled artisan, swallowed his pride and worked nights as a doorman to keep the lights on and food on the table. And even then, when Randy Savage came to the Nassau Coliseum to defend his WWF title against Ric Flair, my pop found a way to get me there. He bought us cheap seats he could barely afford, as well as a T-shirt for me that he most certainly could not.

Despite his relative indifference to wrestling, to this day, my 76-year-old dad will tolerate me changing the channel to *Monday Night Raw* when I visit—if only because it gets me to stick around a little longer and spend some more time with him.

As is the case with any experience a father and child can share, pro wrestling has served to strengthen the bond



Batista isn't the only one smiling since his return to Raw. WWE fans, as well as Contributing Writer Al Castle, are very happy with WWE's most recent draft moves.

between my old man and me. And it was that notion I had in mind when I watched him unwrap his Father's Day gift this past June—a framed sonogram photo of his first grandchild.

Indeed, if all goes well, I will become a dad in January. And I'm already thinking about buying all the wrestling action figures and foam championship belts for my forthcoming little Superstar or Diva, just as my father got them for me. More importantly, I'm looking forward to putting to use all the lessons I've learned over a lifetime about what being a good dad is all about. And when I take my kid to his or her first house show, I hope Grandpa will be sitting next to us. □

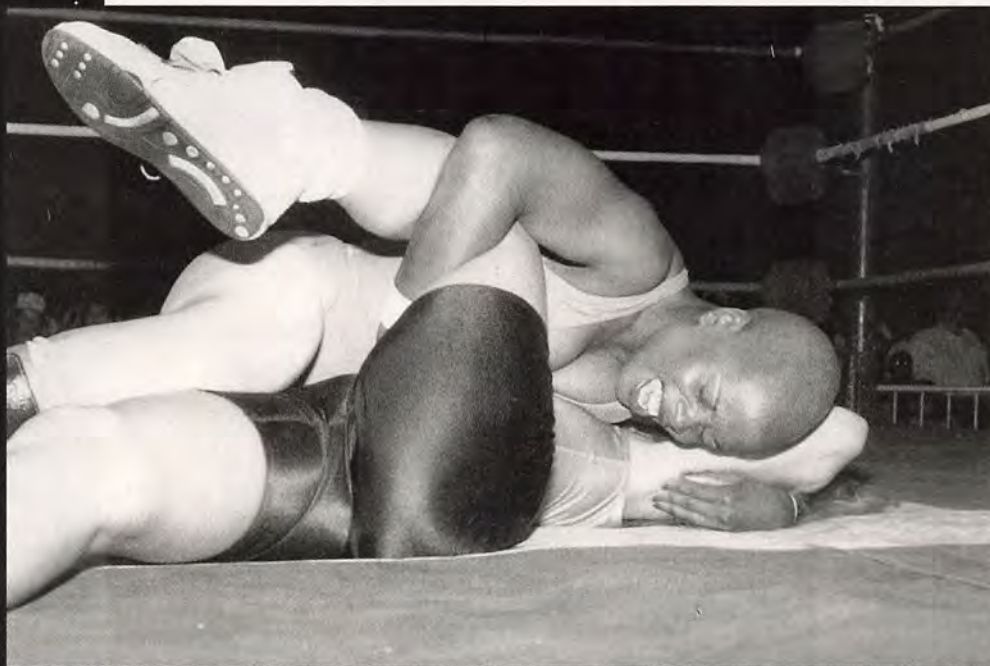
SPOTLIGHT ON . . .

JACQUELINE

A LIFELONG FAN of professional wrestling, Jackie Moore grew up in the hotbed of Dallas, Texas, loving the sport that would eventually be her livelihood ... Met Skandor Akbar while working out at a gym and began training under him ... Was the only female student at Akbar's wrestling school ... Originally trained to wrestle men, as the women's circuit in Texas was not prevalent ... Went by the ring name Sweet Georgia Brown ... Changed her name to Miss Texas while wrestling throughout the southern territories in the late-1980s ... Wrestled primarily for the United States Wrestling Association women's championship in 1992 ... Feuded with Lauren Davenport, Sensational Sherri, and Luna Vachon in her early days with USWA ... Became the first woman to be included in the "PWI 500" (number 483 in 1993) following a victory over Jamie Dundee ... Over a four-year period, held the USWA women's title an astonishing 14 times ... Lost the title for the final time in 1996 to Tasha Simone ... Left USWA as the most decorated female wrestler in the promotion's history ... Trained only Jerry Lawler and PG-13 for overall USWA championship

reigns ... Briefly competed for Smoky Mountain Wrestling in 1995 ... Made only a few appearances, competing against the likes of Ron Davis and The Wolfman ... Looked to make the move from the indy circuit to a larger, more established promotion ... Began contact with World Championship Wrestling and signed a contract with the company in January 1997 ... In WCW, Jacqueline was paired with "Taskmaster" Kevin Sullivan as his girlfriend ... The duo feuded with Sullivan's ex-wife Woman and her boyfriend Chris Benoit throughout much of 1997 ... The angle ended later in the year when Benoit forced Sullivan into retirement ... Jacqueline resurfaced in August 1997 as the manager of Harlem Heat ... It was one of the first times since her early career that Jacqueline was relegated to a supporting role ... Time outside of the squared circle would not last long ... Feuded with male wrestler Disco Inferno in fall 1997 ... Defeated Disco Inferno at Halloween Havoc 1997 in a singles match ... One-year contract with WCW was not renewed and Jacqueline made the logical leap even farther north to WWF ... Debuted with WWF on the June 1, 1998 episode of Raw as, once again, someone's girlfriend ... Paired with

"Marvelous" Marc Mero, Jacqueline entered into her first feud with his former love interest Sable ... Lost to Sable in a bikini contest at WWF's Fully Loaded pay-per-view ... Was awarded the victory the following night due to Sable's use of body paint as a bikini ... Teamed with Mero in a mixed-tag match loss to Sable and Edge at SummerSlam 1998 ... Became the first WWF women's champion in three years by defeating Sable during a September episode of Raw (title had been deactivated after Alundra Blayze took it to WCW with her in 1995) ... Jacqueline was also the first African-American woman to hold the title ... Lost the strap two months later to Sable at Survivor Series ... Founding member of the stable PMS (Pretty Mean Sisters) ... Group originally consist-



July 1991: After changing her name from Sweet Georgia Brown to Miss Texas and shaving her head, Jacqueline arrives in the USWA, where she challenges veteran Kim Anthony.



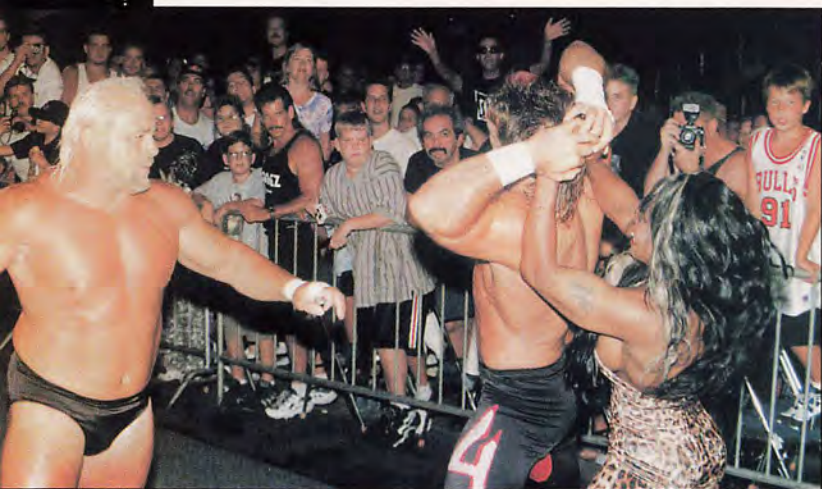
Photo by Lee South TNA Wrestling

JACQUELINE



August 1993: Jacqueline turns up the pain on Luna Vachon, with whom she feuded while wrestling in USWA. A 14-time USWA women's champion, Jacqueline was the most decorated female wrestler in the promotion's history when she left in 1994.

ed of Jacqueline and Terri Runnels, who were both on the outs with their respective males at the time ... Group focused their attention on D'Lo Brown whom they claimed caused Terri's miscarriage ... Turned out, they were lying; Terri never was pregnant ... Time as a member of PMS was short-lived ... Jacqueline left the group in late-1999 and refocused her attention to competing in the ring ... Wrestled Jeff Jarrett in September 1999 in a particularly brutal match that saw Jacqueline choked with the ring ropes and battered with a guitar ... Moved back exclusively to the women's division ... Won a "Gravy Bowl" match in which she wrestled Ivory in a large



March 1997: As Kevin Sullivan's "girlfriend" in WCW, Jacqueline and the "Taskmaster" fight against Sullivan's ex-wife Woman and her boyfriend Chris Benoit.

vat of gravy ... Awarded the "Golden Ladle" trophy for her efforts ... Won a second WWF women's championship by defeating former WWF manager Harvey Whippleman, who was dressed as a woman ... Held the title briefly before losing to Stephanie McMahon ... Aligned herself with the Acolyte Protection Agency during a brief feud with Right To Censor ... Assisted in the APA's WrestleMania X-Seven victory over Right To Censor ... By 2001, Jacqueline was again looking for yet another avenue to explore in the industry ... Found a new challenge as one of the original trainers on the MTV produced WWF reality program *Tough Enough* ... Gained greater attention for her tough attitude and ability to teach the sport ... Following her exposure on *Tough Enough*, Jacqueline branched out into yet another aspect of wrestling by becoming a referee for WWE ... Debuted as a referee at the 2002 Royal Rumble pay-per-view officiating the women's title match between Jazz and Trish Stratus ... Returned to the ring on occasion throughout 2002 and 2003, however could not capture the women's championship again ... Spent the majority of that time period working as a trainer with WWE developmental territory Ohio Valley Wrestling ... Wrestled for the final time as a member of the Raw roster in a loss to Gail Kim on *Heat* ... Moved briefly to the Smackdown brand as her contract with WWE was coming to an end ... In a strange turn of events, Jacqueline challenged Chavo Guerrero Jr. for the cruiserweight championship ... In an even stranger result, Jacqueline won the title, becoming the first-ever female cruiserweight champion in WWE history ... Held the title for eight days before losing it back to Guerrero at WWE's Judgment Day pay-per-view ... Chavo wrestled the match with one hand tied behind



November 1997: As 1998 approaches, Jacqueline finds herself embroiled in a feud with former WCW TV champion Disco Inferno. Disco was just one of several men Jacqueline defeated in her career.



June 1998: As Marc Mero's love interest (left), Jacqueline plays a big part in WWF's "Attitude" era, while feuding with Sable (above), Mero's former valet and real-life spouse.

his back ... Jacqueline's contract ended with WWE in late-2004 and she was not brought back ... Found a new home with upstart TNA Wrestling in late-2004 ... Lost to Trinity at Victory Road ... Returned to TNA the following month, only this time in a role she was equally familiar with: referee ... At Turning Point, Jacqueline officiated a tag team match in which

Johnny Swinger and Glenn Gilberti fell to Pat Kenney and, ironically, her former WWF partner Johnny B. Badd ... Her first tenure with TNA was short-lived, as Turning Point was her final appearance for the company for over a year ... Appeared sporadically with TNA throughout 2006 ... Spent majority of her time back on the independent circuit, primarily with then-TNA affiliate United Wrestling Federation ... Competed in Mexico and with other smaller independents as well during that time period ... Won the IAW women's championship ... Returned to TNA in January 2007 ... Initially went by the name Miss



May 1999: Jacqueline and Terri "Marlena" Runnels recruit Ryan Shamrock to form the PMS faction in WWF. The group recruits Shawn Stasiak to help them terrorize several male competitors.

Tennessee ... Name was changed to the "Pride Of Tennessee" Jackie Moore after, allegedly, receiving a cease and desist letter from the owners of a beauty pageant ... Immediately joined forces with "Cowboy" James Storm ... Set her sights on dismantling Storm's former America's Most Wanted manager Gail Kim ... With Storm, defeated Kim and her partner Petey Williams at Against All Odds ... Repeated the feat at the promotion's Destination X pay-per-view in what was termed a "Rub And Tug" match ... The bout was essentially a double-bullrope match ... Returned to singles wrestling, although the TNA

January 2002: Jacqueline debuts as a WWF referee at the Royal Rumble. Referee was just one of the roles Jacqueline filled in her WWF career. She was also a *Tough Enough* trainer and cruiserweight champ.



women's division was thin at the time ... Lost to Kim in the first ever women's steel cage match at Lockdown 2007 ... Suffered a nasty head injury that resulted in the loss of two teeth during a feisty streetfight with Kim in a later episode of *Impact* ... The resilient Jacqueline recovered in time to compete in a Knockout Gauntlet match at TNA's Bound For Glory pay-per-view ... The winner, Kim, was crowned the first TNA women's champion ... Jacqueline was eliminated by the

imposing Awesome Kong ... Undaunted by the defeat, Jacqueline continued her pursuit of yet another championship reign ... Competed in TNA's "Queen Of The Cage" match at Lockdown 2008 ... Could not outlast eventual winner Roxxi Laveaux ... Also

failed to win the later held "Knockouts Makeover Battle Royal" at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view ... Fortunately, as per a pre-match stipulation, Jacqueline did not have her head shaved despite fail-



April 2007: Jacqueline thrashes Gail Kim with a jarring suplex at TNA's Lockdown 2007, but ultimately falls to the future TNA women's champion in this "Cat Fight In A Cage."

ing to capture the gold ... The same couldn't be said for Laveaux ... Entered into a feud with the Latin American Exchange ... Helped Storm and then-partner Robert Roode apparently win the TNA World tag team title ... Decision was reversed ... Assisted Roode and Storm in a series of attacks on LAX and, in Jacqueline's case, specifically their valet Salinas ... By mid-2008, Jacqueline continued to diversify her interests in TNA by chasing down the women's title while standing loyally by her men. □



November 2004: Despite taking the fight to Trinity in her TNA debut at Victory Road, Jacqueline comes up short in her first match, losing the bout by pinfall.



June 2008: While Jacqueline still wrestles on occasion, her primary job with TNA these days is to guide the team of Beer Money—Robert Roode and James Storm. She often uses a leather strap to assist her men in post-match beat-downs.

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Q & A

"DIAMOND" DALLAS PAGE

"With the right attitude, anything is possible"

DALLAS PAGE TRULY was a diamond in the rough for many years before he finally hit the big time in WCW, capturing the WCW World title three times and becoming a household name at the height of the Monday Night War. With tag team partners such as Jay Leno, Karl Malone, and David Arquette, DDP was destined for mainstream notoriety.

For the first three decades of his life, Page led a rather ordinary existence. He was a successful nightclub manager in both New Jersey and Florida, met a few notables such as Jon Bon Jovi and the future Bam Bam Bigelow, and dabbled in the wrestling business from time to time. He even wrestled as "Handsome" Dallas Page as far back as 1979, but gave up after his few matches didn't meet his expectations.

Everything changed as he watched the "Rock 'n' Wrestling" boom explode in the mid-1980s, and Page deeply regretted not pursuing a wrestling career with more determination. Reasoning it was better late than never, Page sent a tape of promos to the AWA, where he became manager of soon-to-be World tag team champions Paul Diamond and Pat Tanaka. That led to a stint in Florida's Professional Wrestling Federation, where he met two men who would profoundly affect the rest of his life: Dusty Rhodes and Scott Hall.

While Rhodes thought Page had the makings of an all-time great manager, the leader of The Diamond Exchange had larger ambitions: He wanted to be a world heavyweight champion. Page followed Rhodes to WCW, where he trained at the Power Plant. He didn't hit his stride as a wrestler until age 39, when he became a centerpiece of *The WCW Power Hour*, ultimately winning the WCW TV title.

Page's career caught fire in 1997 when—to the surprise of most fans—he refused an offer to join The New World Order, thereby becoming one of the black-and-white faction's most hated enemies. He became one of the most popular U.S. champions of all-time and eventually won the World title, both as a fan favorite and as a heel. Page finished out his career in the WWF, where he and Chris Canyon held the World tag team title.

Today, Page conducts motivational seminars and is the fitness guru behind Yoga for Regular Guys, better known as YRG (www.diamonddallaspage.com). He insists that his

workout method will revolutionize the way people exercise, especially those who want to hold back the hands of time. Page believes YRG is on the verge of becoming bigger than anything he accomplished in his storied wrestling career.

"DDP's attitude and energy is infectious," reported Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who conducted a 90-minute interview with the former WCW World champion. "He has worked long and hard for everything he has achieved, and it's amazing to think that he has been successful at nearly everything he has tried, including the nightclub business, wrestling, acting, motivational speaking, and YRG. I think all of us can learn something from 'Diamond' Dallas Page."

Q: When I conduct these legends "Q&As," I usually hear a lot about golfing, spending time with grandkids, and going to nostalgia conventions. But you're an example of a guy who's still in his prime and staying busy. You're doing seminars, writing books, and starring in movies. In a nutshell, what's your life like these days?

A: I just finished an independent movie called *Red And Blue Marbles* and I'm working on a TV series called *26 Miles*, which is produced by John Schneider, who's famous for *The Dukes Of Hazzard*, *Smallville*, and *Nip/Tuck*—a real icon. We're filming six episodes and hoping that a network will pick it up. The show is filmed off the coast of California in the Catalina Islands, which is—appropriately enough—26 miles from Los Angeles. I have a recurring role as Harry Connor, who is sort of a pirate.

Besides that, I'm doing a lot of inspirational speaking on the corporate level. I show people how to live life at 90 percent. That means that we only have control over 10 percent of our lives, and 90 percent of living is how we react to that stuff. My main focus, though, is YRG, which stands for Yoga For Regular Guys. If you do my workout for three days a week, it'll change the way you feel. If you do it four or five days a week, it'll change your life.

Q: How did a macho guy like you get involved in yoga?

A: For the first 42 years of my life, I wouldn't have been caught dead doing yoga. When my career was really





Dallas Page's first big break came in the late-1980s, when AWA promoter and former champion Verne Gagne (above) signed him to manage World tag team champions Pat Tanaka and Paul Diamond (right).



starting to take off, I ruptured my L4 and L5 vertebrae. Three doctors told me that my career was over. My wife at the time, Kimberly, told me to try yoga. I was thinking, *That crap? That stuff is for sissies.* So, yeah, I get the indifference to yoga. That's why I stress my program is YRG—it's something that takes yoga to whole different level.

Q: Why did yoga appeal to you?

A: It helped me hold back the hands of time. I did everything, chiropractic stuff, organic juicing, and deep massage. What I ultimately developed into YRG gave me more strength and stamina than I'd had in my entire life. Because I didn't start wrestling until age 35, I was damaging my body while trying to stay in the ring long enough to hit my stride. It wasn't like the days when Wahoo McDaniel and Dusty Rhodes could just stand there trade punches with the other guy.

Q: You mean you couldn't get away with just chopping guys in the 1990s.

A: That's right. Those guys were great storytellers and I have the utmost respect for them, but the wrestling

game became much more physical in the late-'90s. My body had to withstand that.

Q: It seems that your entire life has been an example of reacting and adapting. So, in a sense, you've lived life at 90 percent all along. Now you're just getting around to intellectualizing it and explaining your life philosophy to other people.

A: That's right. I came from a broken family, and bounced around families between the ages of three and eight. I also had ADD and dyslexia. Hey, I'm 52 years old now. Back then, people thought you were just stupid. I had no choice but to adapt. With the right attitude, anything is possible.

Q: Being a New Jersey native, you were also a big wrestling fan while you were growing up. I assume you followed the WWF.

A: Absolutely. Bruno Sammartino, Pedro Morales, Chief Jay Strongbow, all those guys. My favorite, though,

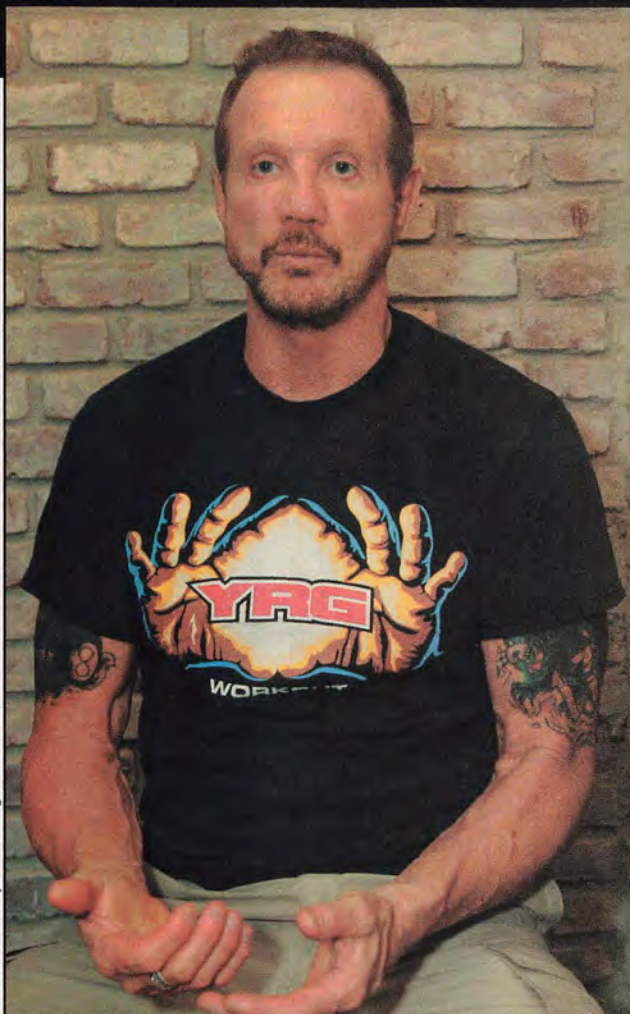
"I came from a broken family, and bounced around families between the ages of three and eight. I also had ADD and dyslexia. Hey, I'm 52 years old now. Back then, people thought you were just stupid. I had no choice but to adapt."

was "Handsome" Jimmy Valiant. So, when I took my first stab at wrestling back in 1979, wrestling for Crybaby Cannon, I modeled myself after Valiant. I had the big hair and was more like a surfer dude/athlete. I never really learned anything and I ended up hurting my knee, which had already been hurt when I was hit by a car when I was 12. I couldn't do anything for a couple of months, and I got my first job working at a nightclub.

Q: When did you get the itch to get back into the wrestling business?

A: When I saw wrestling go through the roof with the "Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection" in the mid-1980s. I kicked myself big-time for not sticking with it. But, looking back, it probably worked out for the best. I was in my 20s, and considering the crazy road schedule back then, I probably would've been on coke and pills, just like everybody else. I'd be crippled today. Roddy Piper and Hulk Hogan can barely walk today, and they're only two years older than me. The "Nature Boy" is eight years older, but he's the exception—he's the only one who can still walk. I always refer to

Interview Photos by Diane Douglass



him as "Nature Boy" because of what he means to the business, and I really don't get along with Ric Flair the person, but that's something I'd like to fix on a personal level at some point.

More than anybody else, Jesse Ventura—not the wrestler, but the commentator—pulled me back into wrestling. He was just terrific. It was December 1987, and I had seen a Cyndi Lauper video on TV, and I told my buddies at the nightclub that I should've been part of "Rock 'n' Wrestling." I said I'd drop the "Handsome" Dallas Page name and become "Diamond" Dallas Page. Since I was 32, too old to be a wrestler, I'd be a manager and have a stable called The Diamond Exchange. Oh, and I'd have a slew of girls called The Diamond Dolls. My buddies were laughing, but I was serious—and I wrote all of that down. All of it happened! Just think: I was the dude who thought of divas in the first place!



As a New Jersey and Florida bar owner, DDP was frequently around flamboyant characters such as rock star Jon Bon Jovi. With a finely tuned gift for the theatrical, Page was a natural fit for the wrestling business.

Q: Wait a minute. Didn't "Playboy" Buddy Rose have a couple of girls in bikinis?

A: There's no comparison! Buddy Rose pulled in a couple of heifers with bikinis and mutt faces. I had smokin' hot chicks from my club. Anyway, we all had a buzz going, laughing about all these crazy ideas I was having. The next day, I was scheduled to go on a radio show called *The Voice*, where I did my own radio commercials and went on the local radio show, doing wrestling promos in different voices: Jimmy Valiant, Jesse Ventura, Capt. Lou Albano, Sgt. Slaughter, I did them all. The

host of the show thought my impressions were great, and he recommended that I send a tape to the AWA. So I cut these promos with all my friends at the nightclub pretending to be wrestlers: Teddy Bear, Rock-Hard Rick, Big Bad John, all sorts of wild gimmicks. Greg Gagne called me back to schedule a tryout, and told me to bring all my girls and fancy clothes. The AWA had just lost Paul Heyman, one of the greatest talkers ever, and really needed a manager on the scene.

Q: How did the tryout go? What was Verne's reaction to you?

A: Me and one of the ladies went to the Showboat in Las Vegas. Verne was sitting there writing, probably the sheet for the night. I'm about 6'7", and Verne looked up at me and said, "You may be the biggest manager in history." I asked if that was a bad thing. He said, "We'll make it work."

Q: What I remember about your AWA stint is that you weren't treated like an up-and-comer, but you were treated as if you were already an established star.

A: Exactly, and I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I was faking all the way! I'll never forget when Curt Hennig, who I miss and loved big-time, said, "Do that thing for me again." Then I realized what he meant. I gave him my "Good gawd!" line. I had a trunk full of



Long before Razor Ramon made waves in the WWF, Dallas Page convinced Scott Hall to shed his cowboy gimmick and join his stable as The Diamond Studd in WCW.

gimmicks, too, just like a magician. I definitely looked like I belonged in the WWF.

Q: Why did you make the switch from the AWA to the PWF in Florida?

A: I was doing the AWA only once a month at that point. I already lived in Fort Myers, Florida, and had worked with Mike Graham while I was managing Badd Company. They used to do sellout houses with the Eddie Graham Memorial and big outdoor events. So, when Graham offered me a shot at working in Florida, I jumped at it. Dusty Rhodes had left WCW and helped start up the PWF down there. He needed a manager in the PWF, and was thinking about bringing in Baby Doll, Sir Oliver Humperdink, or Gary Hart. Mike put me on the phone with Dusty, and I proceeded to deliver a non-stop 45-minute promo, ripping off him, Albano, Jesse, myself, everybody. At the end, I said, "That's all I got, 'Dream.'" All I heard was silence. Finally, Dusty said, "Was that a recordin', kid?"

So, they decided to give me a shot. I jumped in my pink Cadillac with a couple of my buddies and two girls. Our car broke down on the way there. Some rednecks stopped to help us, and I explained that I was a wrestling manager and we were on the way to a show. So we all picked up some beer and more broads and arrived at the building. There, I saw Gordon Solie for the first time. I said, "Hey, Gordon."

"Mike [Graham] put me on the phone with Dusty, and I proceeded to deliver a non-stop 45-minute promo ... At the end, I said, 'That's all I got, 'Dream.' All I heard was silence. Finally, Dusty said, 'Was that a recordin', kid?'"

He said, "Yeah." I said, "I'm here for the show." He said, "Go around to the back." He didn't seem very impressed. I was still a party animal back then.

Q: Wasn't Gordon also?

A: Absolutely, he was—in his own way. Anyway, the house was terrible, with only about 1,000 people showing up. Mike appreciated that I made the show despite the car trouble. Dusty, Mike, and Steve Keirn talked about it and offered me a spot as a manager and as a color commentator with Gordon Solie. I said, "'Dream,' I don't know if I'm ready to work with Solie." He told me not to worry about it. Dusty said that he saw some of himself in me.

Q: That's quite a compliment.

A: Damn right, considering who we're talking about. Dusty was a real mentor to me. Another guy was Jody Hamilton at the Power Plant. Every old-time wrestling fan knows that Jody Hamilton—as The Assassin—was over as a top star for more than 25 years. He's the



first one who really noticed my work ethic and said I had a chance of making it—despite the fact that I was a 35-year-old rookie. Another major influence was Jake Roberts. He molded my psychology in the ring—one of the best minds in the history of the business.

Q: How did you get to WCW?

A: When Dusty went to the WWF, the PWF was pretty much done. Vince made him the polka-dot man and stuck him with Sapphire. That was such a rib on "The Dream," but he made it work. He wasn't a main-eventer, but he had a heckuva feud with Randy Savage. He wasn't the ass-kicker he was in the NWA, because Vince wasn't going to let him play that role. When that was over, he went to WCW. At the same time, I had decided to quit the bar business and pursue an in-ring wrestling career full-time. I asked Dusty whether I should move to Chicago or Atlanta. He said, "I can't tell you what to do, but if I wanted to become something in the wrestling business, I'd come to Atlanta. Dusty gave me a gig managing The Freebirds with no guarantee. I was 35 and making next to nothing, but I went for it.

Q: I first took notice of you in 1995 when you had become pretty much the centerpiece of *The WCW Power Hour* on Saturday mornings. Your feud with Dave Sullivan was very memorable.

A: I thought it was a disaster when we did it, but looking back, it was some of the best, most fun stuff I ever did. I wrote all of that. The angle with Dave evolved into a feud with Johnny B. Badd (Marc Mero). It all went downhill when Mero left for the WWF. They sent "The



Although he was a three-time WCW World champion, DDP got his first taste of gold as the company's TV champion, but it was his later reigns as U.S. champ that really boosted his clout as a main-event player in WCW.



Like many wrestlers, Page borrowed a little bit from various influences to mold his own character. DDP's outrageous showmanship was patterned after Jimmy Valiant's (above). Jesse Ventura's gift of gab as an announcer (top right) lured Page back into a wrestling ring, and Jake Roberts (right) helped teach Page how to tell a story with his actions.

Dream" out to pasture again, and I remember taking a case of beer and a couple of cigars to his house. I had just lost a loser-leaves-town match to The Booty Man. It was a ridiculous angle, and Dusty and I thought we were finished with WCW.

Q: Didn't Kimberly come into the picture during the feud with Dave Sullivan?

A: Yes, Kimberly was one of the Diamond Dolls and she had a lot of good-looking friends. One of them lived with Goldberg for 12 years, long before he came into wrestling. Bischoff noticed that Kimberly was selling her role better than the other girls and suggested that she become the only Diamond Doll. If Marc Mero hadn't left, she would've become one of the top women in the business. That whole Johnny B. Badd thing could've made her career. As we now know, Sable got that spot in the WWF.

Looking back, I wasn't supposed to be a star in WCW. Kevin Sullivan and Arn Anderson tried to bury me. Guys like Dusty, Jake Roberts, and Eric Bischoff warned me when I was being set up to fail. It wasn't Bischoff's idea to push me, but he did protect me in that sense. I didn't truly appreciate that until I was in WWE—but that's a different story.

Q: Bischoff was really made out to be a villain during that era. He was often accused of holding people

"I wasn't supposed to be a star in WCW. Kevin Sullivan and Arn Anderson tried to bury me. Guys like Dusty, Jake Roberts, and Eric Bischoff warned me when I was being set up to fail."

back and being ruthless at times. How did you view Bischoff?

A: Eric Bischoff was an egomaniac, and that was the only reason he ever beat Vince. Eric honestly thought he could beat him, but he wasn't trying to put anybody out of business. In 1994 and '95, Bischoff was saying how we were going to beat Vince. That was inconceivable to most people, about as inconceivable as me becoming a world champion someday. By the way, do you know it was Kevin Nash's idea to put the strap on me, not Bischoff's? I was asked to go to the meeting right before our four-way dance in Las Vegas, and Nash said I should get the strap. Hulk loved the idea, too.

Q: Do you regret that you won the belt in a four-way, not a one-on-one match?

A: I would've loved to have won the belt in a one-on-one match, but I was never going to get that opportunity at 43 years old. Eric saw me as a main-eventer, but not as someone with the strap. He didn't see that in Mick Foley either.



Q: He didn't recognize Steve Austin's potential either. You really hit your stride as the U.S. champion. In particular, I remember your series of matches against Chris Benoit. What was it like to work with him?

A: Benoit kept to himself. I was on a rocket at that time, and I wanted to work with the main-eventers. But the main-eventers didn't work as hard as the upper mid-level guys, like Chris and Raven. Both were very talented.

Chris' body and brain got so beat up because he treated every night like a pay-per-view. So did I. Most guys didn't pull out everything for *Thunder* on Thursday nights, but we did. *Thunder* was doing over a 4.0 at the time, and it was a secondary show. Guys used to laugh at me. I was the first guy to ice his body in wrestling—they thought I was a sissy. I taped all my matches—they thought I was a mark for myself. But all of that was just my work ethic, which got results.



With fellow Jersey alums Bam Bam Bigelow and Chris Canyon, Page formed The Triad in WCW. The long-standing friendship among the three no doubt played a part in the trio's success.



The phenomenon of Bill Goldberg was certainly helped by his feud with Page. DDP is justifiably proud of getting Goldberg to perform at a higher level when they squared off in WCW.

Q: What really helped you break through to the main-event level?

A: Bischoff knew I could draw money, but things didn't start to happen until Kevin Nash, Scott Hall, and Randy Savage said they wanted to work with me.

Q: If I had to pick a breakthrough moment, I would choose your match against Bill Goldberg for the WCW World title at Halloween Havoc back in '98.

A: Anybody who says I can't work should watch that match [laughs]. Watch Bill Goldberg with anybody else, and there's your proof. With me, Goldberg looked great.

Q: Goldberg's grassroots popularity grew into a phenomenon, but it's fair to say that your popularity evolved from the grassroots as well.

A: As far as Goldberg is concerned, it's not hard to be popular when you don't lose a match! How can you not get over? Combine that with his look and charisma, and you have the Goldberg phenomenon. But Bischoff should've let me drop Goldberg with a diamond-cutter at Halloween Havoc. My career would've gone through the roof and it wouldn't have hurt Goldie at all. I could've put him over at the next pay-per-view. Look, Goldberg was a phenom, but his downfall was that he didn't love wrestling.

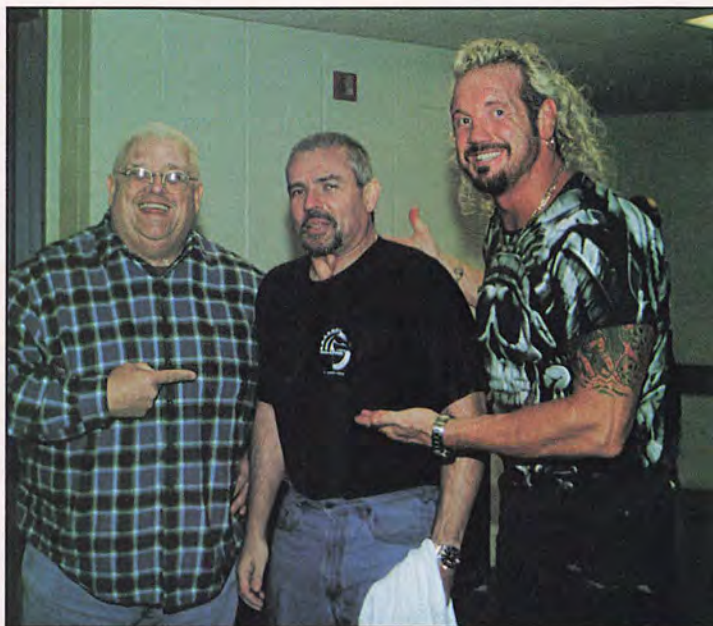
Q: You mean he didn't have enough passion for the business to get through the tough times.

A: Billy couldn't have survived what I went through in my career. It's like second- and third-generation wrestlers who don't have to pay as many dues as their dads. That's why they get so much heat.

You want me to tell you about the crap associated with the wrestling business? Consider this: If Steve Austin had dropped Vince McMahon with the stunner for the first time at the 9:00 hour, how many times would the WWF have replayed that for the next two hours?

Q: Maybe three or four times.

A: When I turned on the NWO, one of the biggest moments of 1997, do you remember how many times that was replayed?



Page credits Dusty Rhodes with bringing him to WCW, Eric Bischoff with protecting him while he worked out of Atlanta (above), and ex-wife Kimberly (opposite page) for extending his in-ring career by introducing him to the benefits of yoga.

"I helped mastermind the whole NWO era, and those guys were there for me like I was there for them. And I didn't even know Bischoff had signed them in '96! It changed wrestling forever."

Q: No, I don't remember.

A: That's because they didn't replay it. Certain people didn't want to see me catch fire, so it was suppressed.

Q: Did certain members of the NWO not want it replayed?

A: No, that's not it at all. Let's go back into history a little bit. I helped create the NWO. It goes back to my relationship with Scott Hall in the PWF. I'd always had this idea for The Diamond Studd, an enforcer type. He called me while I was managing The Freebirds in WCW. He said, "You're so tall, you're makin' The Freebirds look like midgets. You need a 290-pound movie star out there to make you all look good." I called Magnum T.A. in the WCW office, and he said that Dusty felt Scott already had two chances and couldn't draw money. I told Scott to dye his hair like The Honky Tonk Man and do a *Scarface* impression. Then I saw a George Michael video on MTV and noticed that he had a cool, brush-cut look. I told Scott

that he had to shave his mustache, which he'd had since he was 16.

Q: So you told him the Marlboro Man wasn't working. What was neat about that transformation is that the average wrestling fan had no idea it was Scott Hall.

A: Dude, *nobody* recognized him. It was freakin' Scott out. We were eating near the Centre Stage in Atlanta and saw Tommy Rich. I said, "Tommy, you recognize The Diamond



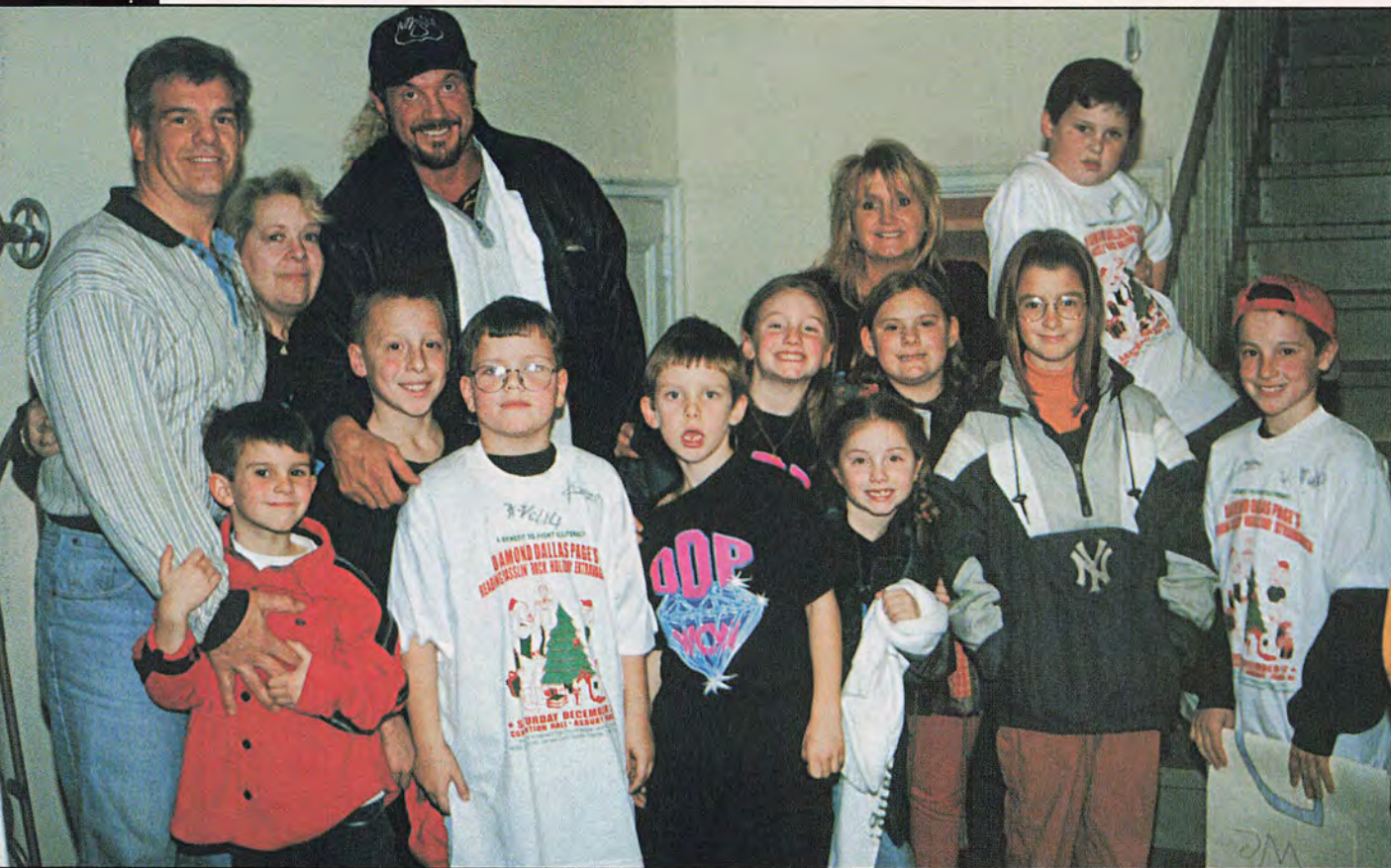
Studd, don't you?" Tommy hesitated, then said yes. Then Scott said, "You do *not* recognize me" in that *Scarface* voice. Tommy was scared to death, then he looked closer, and you could see the look of relief on his face. He couldn't believe it was Scott. Then we came up with the idea of shooting our toothpicks into the camera at the same time. So, basically, I came up with the Razor Ramon character as we were coming out of a Waffle House. Then he goes to the WWF and makes a ton of money.

The same goes for Kevin Nash. He was Vinnie Vegas and was going to quit, but I told him to stick it out. I told him to stay focused, not to let them beat you. You see, I helped mastermind the whole NWO era, and those guys were there for me like I was there for them. And I didn't even know Bischoff had signed them in '96! It changed wrestling forever.

Q: Sometimes we forget how incredibly hot WCW was at the time. In my home office, I still have a DDP bobble head, a DDP cling-on on my wall, and other DDP memorabilia. What was it like to walk into a mall and see your face everywhere?

A: I'll never forget going to a toy fair with Hulk before the Christmas of '97. I saw my likeness on 60 different things, dolls, action figures, everything. On 50 of





As a child who struggled with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder, Page has gone out of his way to give back to many of his younger, less fortunate fans. His charitable acts have ranged from founding a literacy program to running Toys for Tots campaigns.

those items, I was giving the diamond symbol. Earlier that year, when we did spring break in Panama City, Florida, Hulk and I walked into a bar and everybody started chanting "DDP"! Hulk said, "Do you know how hard it is to make that happen?" But, to me, it wasn't hard at all.

Q: I suppose Hulk hadn't heard that kind of reaction in a long time.

A: No, he hadn't. The whole ride was phenomenal. Hey, I was ranked number four in the "PWI 500" for two years in a row, right behind Austin and Goldberg. Now that's some stiff competition ... and a creative era that we'll never see again.

Q: You turned heel soon after winning the WCW World title, and you later formed The Triad with Bam Bam Bigelow and Chris Canyon. Bam Bam is another wrestler who left us too soon. What did you think of your fellow wrestler from the Jersey Shore?

A: I had known Bam Bam since he was 16. We were both from Monmouth County. Although you needed to be 18 to come into our club, he came in when he was 17. He ran with The Breed, a bunch of bad-ass bikers. He was always a good guy to me, and we often talked about wrestling. When I saw him on World Class Wrestling from Texas, I knew I could



"There's no other business where you can make a million dollars a year and think about getting out of it. There's a lot of camaraderie, but there's also a lot of backstabbing."

be a wrestler, too. He was so gifted, big, and strong. I didn't have those tools, but he was an inspiration to me.

Q: You guys seemed to have chemistry, probably because you were real-life friends.

A: I brought Bam Bam into WCW for that run. Yeah, we could've been the new Freebirds.

Q: But The Triad didn't last very long.

A: The bookers wouldn't let it last. It was such a pure concept. We could have interchanged the belts, just like The Freebirds. Dusty dug it, but Vince Russo was involved at the time. Listen, wrestling is the greatest thing I've ever done, but it's also been the most stressful. There's no other business where you can make a million dollars a year and think about getting out of it. There's a lot of camaraderie, but there's also a lot of backstabbing.

Q: I'm sure that made your real friendships all the stronger. Specifically, I'm thinking about your friendship with Chris Kanyon and how you stood firmly beside him when he came out of the closet.

A: Yes, I was there for his announcement for the Reunion pay-per-view. For some reason, I was



coughing up blood all weekend. I didn't know what the hell was going to happen to me. I went to the hospital and Chris wanted to call the announcement off. I said, "No, Chris, it's not about me. It's about you making your announcement." Finally, doctors told me to gargle ice water and that stopped the bleeding. So I pulled myself together and was there for Chris that night. That shows you how crazy wrestling is. Chris talked to Stephanie about coming in to WWE as the only legitimately gay wrestler, but they didn't go for it.

Q: Did Chris hide his sexuality from you for all of those years?

A: I had no idea. I've since found out that a lot of gay guys are just regular guys.

Q: What's Chris doing these days?

A: The last time I spoke to him, he was looking into doing stunt work.

Q: Of course, you were involved in one of the most notorious events in wrestling history when David Arquette won the WCW World title in a tag team match.

A: People will never let that go. Did you know that David Arquette got a payoff of 10-grand, and he gave it to Melanie Pillman? Also, David was appalled that they wanted to put the strap on him. He said, "No, you can't put the World title on me!" I said, "I know we can't, but that's their decision."

Q: You meant, "We can't, but we are."

A: It was Russo's idea to get press. Bischoff was against it, but he was trying to get



Considering his self-promotional skills and nose for the spotlight, it was no surprise Page found mainstream success working with world-famous celebrities like Jay Leno (opposite page) and Karl Malone (above).

along with Russo at the time. Some idiots not paying attention actually think Arquette beat me. I went into the match as the defending champion, but Arquette pinned Eric Bischoff in that match. David didn't want it, but he had to run with it. There have been plenty of things in this business I didn't want to do. I've seen Vince do some stupid stuff, too, like John Cena lying down for K-Fed.

Q: You're right. It went nowhere and meant nothing. In theory, do you think that a comedian wearing the belt cheapens wrestling, or do people take it too seriously?

A: Smart marks care about it, but people take it too seriously. It's entertainment, and it lasted only for a blip.

Q: Of course, we shouldn't forget that Vince Russo held the WCW belt, too.

A: That's right, you don't hear anybody say anything about that. David Arquette was far more believable than Russo *[laughs]*. The only non-wrestler as champion who was believable was Vince McMahon because he's one tough S.O.B. Look, I didn't do the job for Arquette and I didn't do the job for K-Fed. I did the job for Sara (The Undertaker's ex-wife)!

Q: Do you think entering the WWF as the stalker was a mistake?

A: What do you think? *[Laughs.]* I take responsibility for all my actions. McMahon didn't put a gun to my head.

Q: You figured that if Dusty could make the polka dots work, you could make the stalker work?



Upon entering the WWF in 2001, Page envisioned a long, lucrative battle against The Rock for the right to call himself "The People's Champion," but unfortunately for DDP, WWE never pursued the program.

A: No, Vince swerved me. Listen to this: Two years before my meeting with Vince, I met The Rock, who was very respectful. I was already known as the "People's Champion" and he had started to call himself the same thing. The Rock was putting on one of his \$1,500 Versace shirts as I was leaving with The Big Show, and I hear, "Hey, 'Diamond,' there's only one 'People's Champion.'" Big Show just lost it. I turned around and, after a pregnant pause, said, "You know what, Rock? You're right."

I eventually developed an entire scenario in my head. So when I came to the WWF, "People's Champion" vs. "People's Champion" was a natural. I mentioned it to Vince, but he brushed it off and said Booker T was working with The Rock. So I figured Vince was the smartest man ever and let it go. That was stupid on my part. I should have got up



Page's first role in WWF was that of a stalker who targeted The Undertaker's then-wife, Sara. This led to a feud with UT that was neither rewarding nor fulfilling for either superstar.

"I was stalking the wife of The Undertaker, a guy who would never sell for me. How was that ever going to work for me?"

from the table, shook Vince's hand, and told him that I loved the stalker idea but it wasn't for me. I should have told him to call me when he wanted "People's Champion" vs. "People's Champion." I guarantee he would have called me before I got to the airport. It's the only time I didn't listen to my instincts. I tell you, Harry, everything was tailor-made for that angle. Every planet was lined up perfectly and it didn't happen.

My problem was I didn't think it through. I was stalking the wife of The Undertaker, a guy who would never sell for me. How was that ever going to work for me? I figured Vince was paying a half-million for me and I was the perfect employee, so he had to love me. I was too big of a mark for Vince. Obviously, he never



saw my match against Goldberg or he would've acted totally different to me.

Q: You seem to be very meticulous when it comes to planning your career, down to specific angles and matches. I remember Kevin Nash, in a throwaway line on *Thunder*, said that working with you was like dealing with a NASA blueprint. Have you taken ribbing for all of your prep work?

A: [Laughs.] I can call a match from A to Z, but it just won't be as good as a match planned out ahead of time. That's why actors rehearse! The reason Steamboat and Flair didn't have to call anything is because they had already wrestled 3,000 times! I didn't have that luxury. I trained at the Power Plant, not on the road. I knew how to improv on a dime and could talk with the very best of them. Will I get the credit? Probably not. Nobody's had such a successful career with so much working against him, not Bret Hart, not Hulk Hogan, not Ric Flair—nobody.

I never forgot my roots. I kept going back to the Power Plant after I'd made it. Bischoff and Kimberly told me to stop going, stop beating up your body. But I found that the more I taught, the more I learned. I wanted to have a helluva match with either Rey Mysterio Jr. or The Giant (Big Show), it didn't matter.

Q: So you regret the way the feud with The Undertaker worked out.

A: I tore my meniscus at the end of that angle with 'Taker. It was a debacle. We didn't mesh. If he'd sold for me only one-third of what he just did for Edge, we could've had an incredible angle. He's one of the best big men workers ever. I just wish I had dealt with that version of The Undertaker. I'm not surprised by how it



After leaving the WWF, DDP laid low until resurfacing in 2005 to battle Robert Roode and Petey Williams of Team Canada. His body wracked by injury, Page's tenure in TNA didn't last long.

turned out, though. I'm sure I had plenty of heat coming in from WCW.

Q: After that, you fell into a groove with the Positively Page character. Wasn't that just an exaggerating version of yourself?

A: Absolutely. And that turned out great because I had a very good rivalry with Christian. Other than The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan, our match told a better story than any other match at WrestleMania X-8. Christian is a great performer.

Q: Of course, your neck injuries finally caught up with you and you had to retire. But you made a surprising comeback in TNA in 2005.

A: Yeah, I remember I got a hard time for not doing the job for Monty Brown. Where the heck is he these days?

Q: I think we've all lost his address. I remember you had a very physical match with Jeff Jarrett for the NWA title. Do you think you still had "it"?

A: I surprised myself by how well I did. No, I wasn't the same "Diamond" Dallas Page as 1998, but Jeff and I still had a kick-ass match. I'm very proud of it.

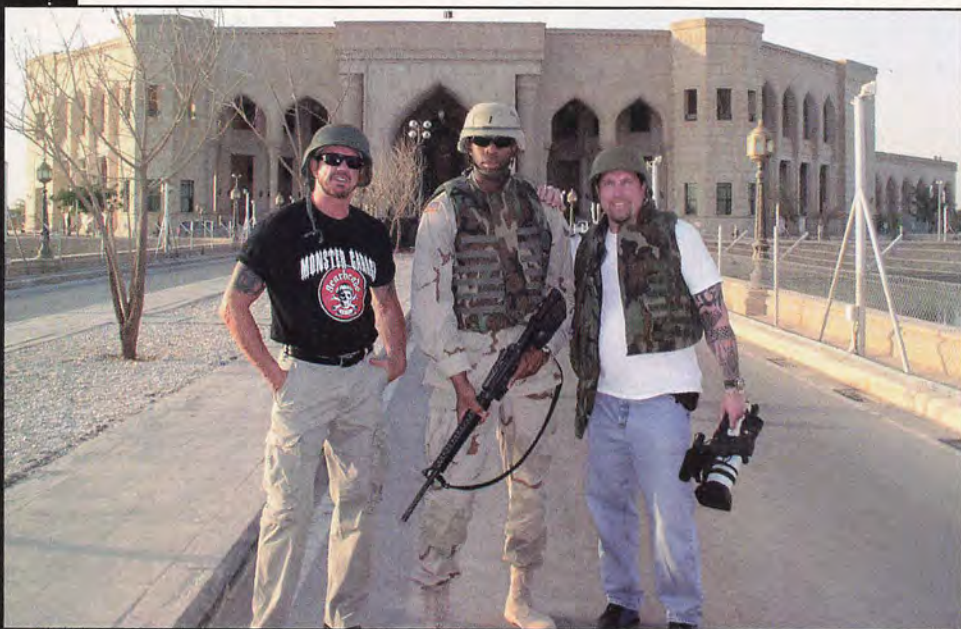
Q: Are you able to comment on the court case you won against Jay-Z regarding the use of the diamond symbol?

A: No, not really. Look, I don't have any grudge against Jay-Z. I think he's a phenomenal performer. I just had to protect my intellectual property. It was nothing personal.

Q: As we've discussed, you have parlayed your fame as a wrestler into a career as a fitness guru. Why are you so convinced that YRG is going to be so huge?

A: Just look at the results. Anybody who visits my website, www.Diamonddallaspage.com, will see living testimonies that the program works. I challenge anyone to watch the video of Arthur Boorman, a former Persian Gulf War vet, and how he lost 150 pounds. The man couldn't walk without a cane, and now he runs daily. Anyone who watches that video will be inspired. There are so many incredible stories on my website. And it's entertaining, too. Anybody who takes part in my YRG plan will definitely have fun doing it.

Q: To your credit, you've been active in charities for your entire career. I remember you dressing as Santa Page for kids in the Atlanta area, as well as establishing a lit-



Dallas Page has made four trips to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the American troops (above). While overseas, Page introduced servicemen and women to his YRG (Yoga for Regular Guys) program (below).



"I had a very good rivalry with Christian. Other than The Rock vs. Hulk Hogan, our match told a better story than any other match at WrestleMania X-8. Christian is a great performer."

eracy program. I also understand that you recently visited the troops in Iraq.

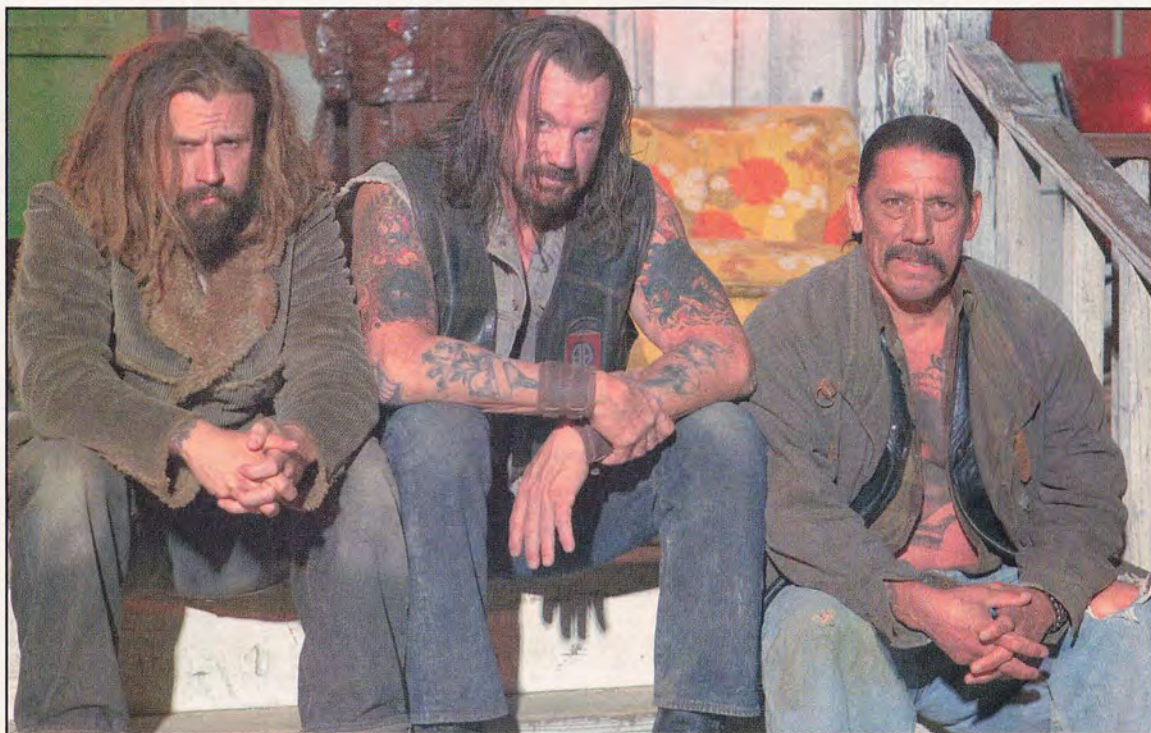
A: I've been to Afghanistan and Iraq; actually I've been to Iraq four times. Even if you hate the war, love the warrior. You've got to support our guys because they make it possible for all of us to do what we do. I hear people clapping for our guys and gals in airports. It's terrific. I don't care whether McCain or Obama becomes President; we're not leaving there anytime soon. We're still in Japan and Germany after 60 years! There's a noticeable difference in the relationship between the Americans and the Iraqis since my first trip there. Now, it's "Hey, 'Diamond,' come take a picture with my friend, Hassan." They're friends now. Our soldiers are doing a lot of good stuff over there, too.

Q: One final question: What's Jon Bon Jovi really like?

A: I knew Bon Jovi when he was still a nobody. I'll never forget when Bon Jovi was at the height of his



popularity, back in 1987, I managed to get backstage passes for a Bon Jovi concert. I thought, *I'll be surprised if he even acknowledges that he knows me.* But he saw me, remembered me from years earlier, and gave me a smile and a hug. He's a first-rate dude. □



These days, Page spends minimal time in a wrestling ring and has moved on to motivational speaking and acting careers, starring in such films as *The Devil's Rejects* with Rob Zombie and Danny Trejo.

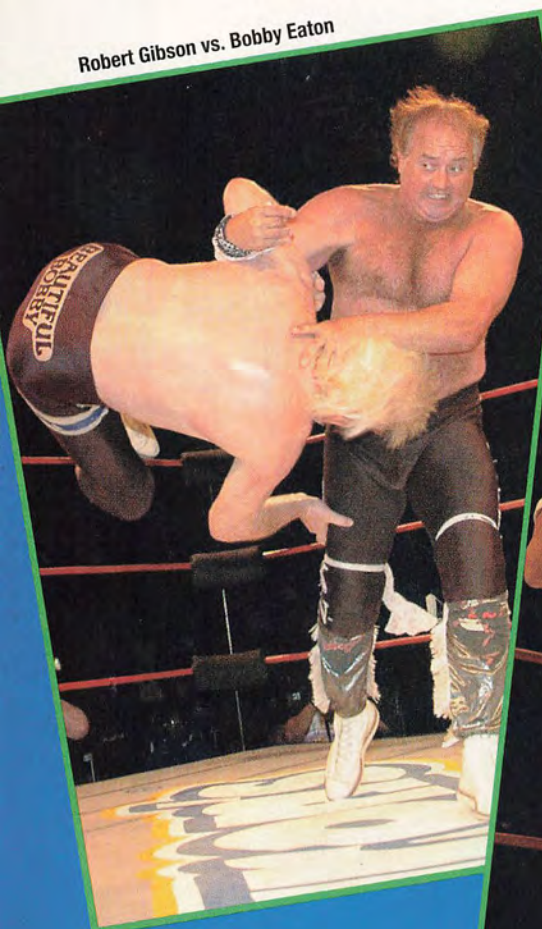


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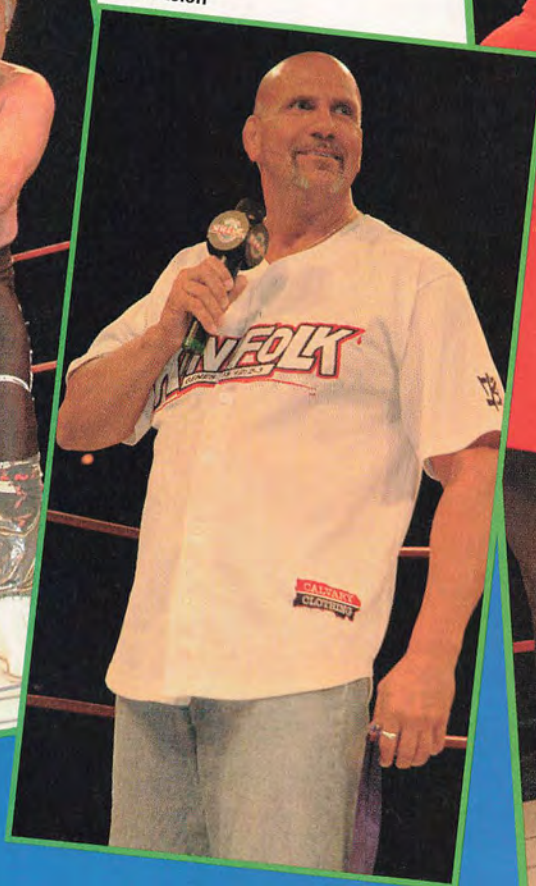
SPECTACULAR:

No Flair? No Worries!

Robert Gibson vs. Bobby Eaton



Nikita Koloff



Jim Cornette & Corsica Joe



BY DAVE ROSENBAUM

PHOTOS BY SHANE M. KIDDER/NWA

IT SHOULD HAVE been a deal-breaker, a party-pooper. After all, the guest of honor wasn't coming. The marquee name was suddenly off the marquee. And the NWA had suffered yet another setback at the hands of WWE.

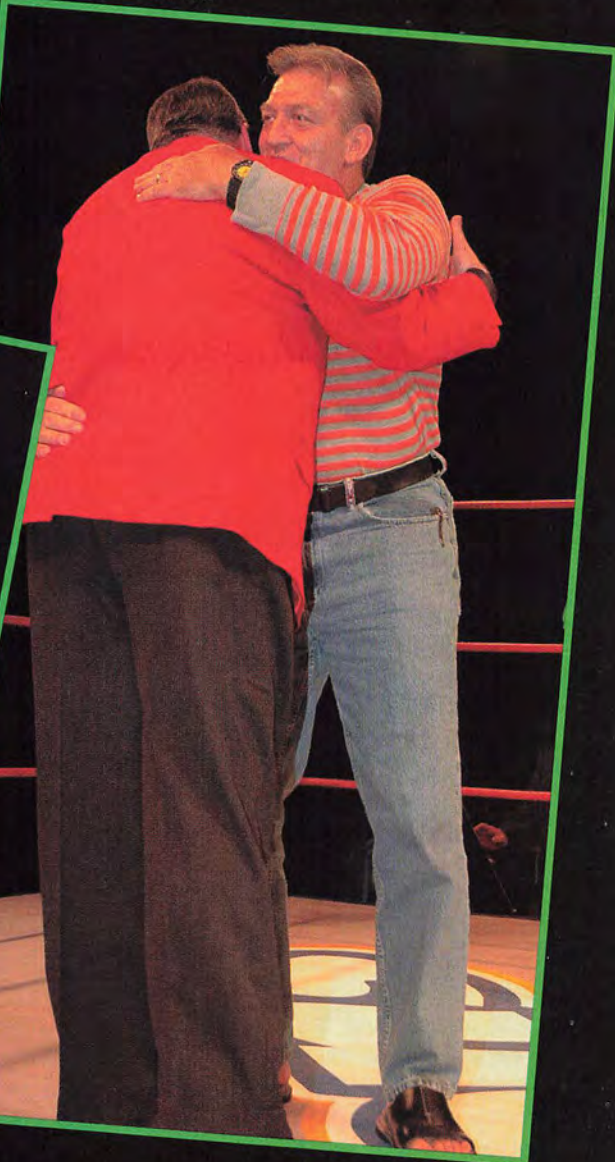
Sound familiar? Well, it would if you substituted the "E" in WWE for an "F." It had happened so many times before. When the NWA has something big planned, the WWF finds a way to overshadow it. Party over.

But not this time. That's because this time, the NWA had history on its side. And memories. And some damn good wrestling, too.

The NWA's 60th anniversary show was supposed to feature the Hall of Fame induction of Ric

The night was supposed to belong to Ric Flair. Instead, it belonged to the long, proud history of the NWA—and that was just fine with the fans

Cornette & Paul Orndorff



Zokre vs. Chase Stevens



Flair, perhaps the greatest wrestler in the federation's history. It didn't. Although it should have, it didn't matter.

The NWA press release, sent out May 30, 2008, read: "The word 'legend' is thrown around a lot these days, but the 'Nature Boy' Ric Flair is the very definition of the word, and the National Wrestling Alliance will be inducting him into the NWA Hall of Fame on June 7 at the Philips Arena in Atlanta, Georgia." It also included this quote from NWA Executive Director Robert Tobich: "With Ric Flair's involvement, I'd say our 60th anniversary event is truly going to be a history-making one. This marks the first time in close to 20 years that Flair is going to step into an NWA building."

The announcement was met with some skepticism. On *prowwrestling.net*, Jason Powell wrote, "What's up with the kinder and gentler WWE allowing Ric Flair to appear at the NWA's 60th anniversary show? Is he allowed to take non-WWE bookings? Granted, the NWA poses no threat to Vince McMahon's kingdom, but since when has that mattered? Is the old man mellowing? Does Vince even know about this booking?"

The skepticism was well-founded. WWE *didn't* allow Flair, who is still under contract, to show up.

"We had an agreement with Flair, and we were never told we had to have a deal with WWE," said NWA promoter David Marquez. "Then we were told by the WWE that he's their intellectual property. The thing is, we were offering Ric more than one date. We were planning on having him make appearances throughout the NWA, but that didn't work out. Ric wanted to come. He wanted to be there."

Bottom line: Flair wasn't there—but here's who was:

Jim Cornette—whose ties to the NWA are as long as any one's—was the master of ceremonies for the Hall of Fame induction. First, he brought out Paul Orndorff, who will be inducted in 2009. Then came the class of 2008. Nikita Koloff, the first inductee, came out to a huge ovation. Koloff was followed by The Iron Sheik, who thanked Ted Turner and Gordon Solie, two of the most important names in NWA history.

Next came Corsica Joe and Cornette's own Midnight Express, who later in the card would renew their legendary rivalry with The Rock 'n' Roll Express. Then came Tommy Rich, a former NWA World champion. He would show he still had something left by brawling with Abdullah the Butcher.

Yes, *that* Abdullah the Butcher, the madman who terrorized the NWA for so many decades. This time, he rudely interrupted the Hall of Fame ceremony before it was completed.

By any measure, this is not your grandfather's NWA. It's probably not even your father's NWA. The NWA has been in operation since 1948, although the federation of today hardly looks like the one that, along with the WWF, dominated wrestling until the early-1980s. It was, for a long time, the largest governing body



Even through traditional NWA wrestling could hardly be labeled "extreme" or "hardcore," fans very much enjoyed the bloodfest between Abdullah the Butcher and Tommy Rich.



Just seven matches into his most recent comeback, Sid Vicious made quick work of Davey Boy Bling and Juicy Justin Corino in a handicap match, much to the crowd's delight.

in pro wrestling. It was the NWA of Lou Thesz, Harley Race, and, of course, Ric Flair. It was the NWA of The Midnight Express, The Funk Brothers, The Brisco Brothers, The Road Warriors, and Dusty Rhodes, who ruled the NWA in the middle of the 20th century. It was the NWA that battled the WWF for North American wrestling dominance and, for a while, seemed primed to win that battle.

There is a common misconception that the NWA became WCW. It never did. WCW was part of the NWA and, in 1991, officially broke away, becoming a powerful national promotion on the scale that the NWA had once been. There is also a common misconception that the NWA World title was simply renamed the WCW World title. Again, untrue. The WCW and NWA World titles

went their separate ways, as did WCW and the NWA. So, although WCW was an offspring of the NWA, the NWA continued to live a life of its own ... just not the life it had lived. Still, today's NWA has direct lineage to the NWA of the 1940s.

And, so, with that in mind, the NWA forged ahead with its 60th anniversary show, mindful and respectful of the federation's history. It even decided to hold the show in an appropriate place—Atlanta, Georgia, which for so many years was the center of pro wrestling in North America. That the venue was the Philips Arena, as opposed to The Omni or a small TBS studio, was irrelevant.

But you never would've known that the time was different. In fact, for more than two hours, you even might have thought you were back in the 1970s. The action was *that* good and the names were *that* legendary.

Despite Cornette's interference, the Midnights lost to the Rock 'n' Rolls ... the original Rock 'n' Rolls, consisting of Ricky Morton and Robert Gibson. Tommy Rich and Abdullah the Butcher battled to a no-contest in a match that never officially started. In perhaps the biggest wrestling event of the night, Sid Vicious, in his seventh match since coming out of retirement, destroyed Davey Boy Bling and Juicy Justin Corino in 3:54. It was a typical Sid Vicious dismantling—quick and painful—and the crowd loved it.

The NWA also showcased some of the finest current talent. For example, Mike DiBiase beat Idol Stevens to retain the NWA North American title. Mike Quackenbush defended the junior heavyweight championship against Ricky Vega. Iceberg beat Judas and Shatter to defend the anarchy heavyweight championship. Los Luchas—Phoenix Star and Zokre—retained the tag team title.

As outstanding as the wrestling was, the crowd, which nearly filled the reconfigured Philips Arena, was even more impressive, roaring from the opening bell until the final pin, and cheering respectfully with the announcement of each Hall of Fame inductee. They were there as much for the history as for the wrestling. Maybe even more so, which is a testament to the NWA's place in wrestling history.

And by the time the fans walked out of the arena, drunk with nostalgia and satisfied with a night of non-stop excitement that would have done the old NWA proud, none of them were even talking about Ric Flair, which is a testament to the magic of the NWA's past, present, and future. □



Judas hurls Shatter onto a supine Iceberg, who would recover and win the three-way match. The NWA 60th anniversary wasn't just about history. The company also made a point of showcasing its current talent to fans.

JOHN CENA MAKES A DREAM COME TRUE!

BY LISA ROCCHI-DOYLE
PHOTOS BY VANESSA COVOLO

TELLING KIDS TO take their vitamins and say their prayers made Hulk Hogan the picture perfect role model of the 1980s. For today's generation, John Cena's message of loyalty and respect makes the former WWE champion this decade's all-American wrestling hero. The nature of his persona makes Cena a shining example to his horde of adolescent wrestling fans. John Cena always wins, he always does the right thing, he talks smoothly, and he kicks the butts of WWE's biggest, baddest, and meanest heels.

So then, it is no wonder seven-year-old Jeremy Justus of Lakemont, Georgia, picked meeting John Cena as his one big wish to be redeemed through the Kids' Wish Network foundation.

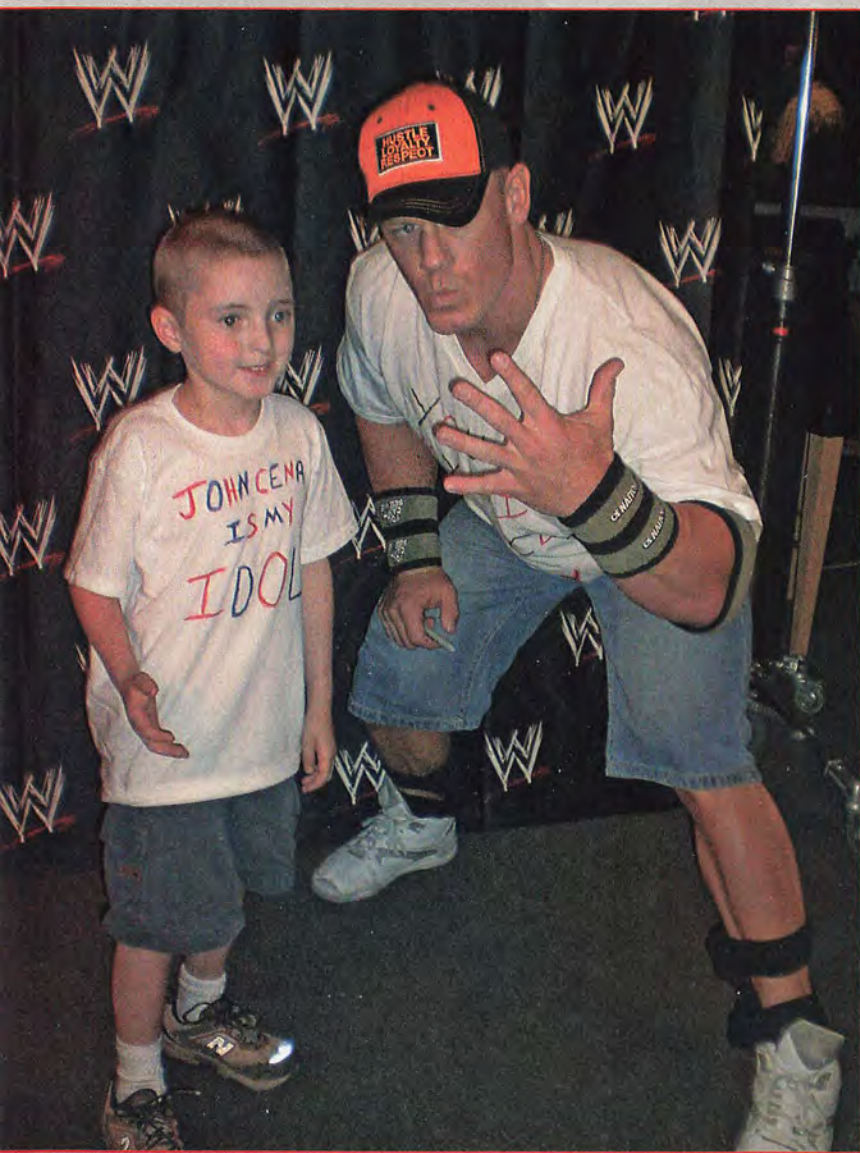
The Kids' Wish Network is, as the name suggests, a wish-granting organization for children with life-threatening illnesses. Cheryl Gragg, contacted the foundation about her grandson Jeremy, who suffers from cerebral palsy. When Vanessa Covolo, a Wish Coordinator for the organization, found out that his wish was to meet "The Champ," she took the steps to make it happen.

"Jeremy's case was particularly moving. This little boy has been through so much in his young life," said Covolo. "But in spite of everything he's been through, he's just this incredibly sweet and happy kid. You can't help but fall in love with him!"

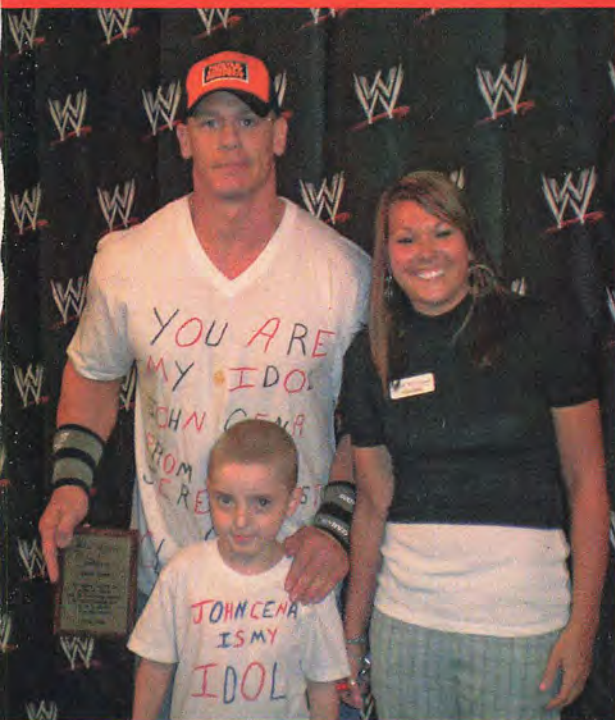
Besides the daily struggles of living with cerebral palsy since he was an infant, Jeremy has endured a variety of seizures all his life, and he must wear leg braces. He has been a frequent hospital patient during his seven short years and takes a variety of medications.

Soon after Covolo learned of Jeremy's wish, he was on a plane to San Antonio to watch his idol in a WWE match at the AT&T Center. Traveling with him, per doctor's orders, were his mother, Donna Justus, and grandmother, Cheryl.

Before the show, Batista, Ric Flair, Edge, and The Hardys afforded Jeremy first-class treatment, posing



A dream come true



John Cena, Jeremy Justus, and Vanessa Covolo

for pictures and autographing his T-shirt.

But all that was secondary to Jeremy's sole reason for flying from Georgia to Texas. When John Cena walked in to the room to greet Jeremy, the boy became timid, according to Jeremy's mother, Donna. But Jeremy, who donned a shirt proclaiming "John Cena Is My Idol," was not too shy to present Cena with a homemade "You Are My Idol, John Cena" T-shirt and an official Kids Wish Network Guardian Angel coin. Jeremy clearly saw the WWE star as his guardian angel, and Cena was honored.

"He was definitely nervous," said Covolo, "but he warmed up in no time. Cena was so natural and comfortable with Jeremy. It was really great!"

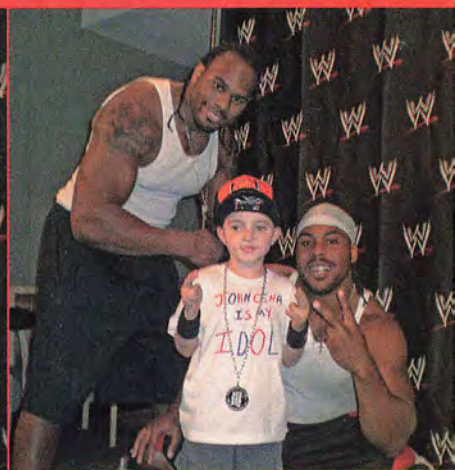
According to Donna and Jeremy, Cena's win over Edge that night in San Antonio was due to the luck of that Guardian Angel coin, and it was the perfect end to a perfect day the mother, son, and grandmother will never forget. Donna told Vanessa, "It was the best day of his life ... He'll remember this day forever."

When he returned home to Lakemont, Georgia, Jeremy returned to business as usual, but the memory of that single day in San Antonio with his hero keeps him smiling despite the struggles of his illness. "He is doing okay," said his mother. "And he still watches John Cena and cheers him on."

Kids Wish Network is a nationally recognized non-profit organization dedicated to infusing hope, creating happy memories, and improving the quality of life for children. If you know a child between the ages of three and 18 who may be in need of its wish granting services, please call 727-937-3600 or toll free 888-918-9004. For more information on Kids Wish Network, visit their website at www.kidswishnetwork.org.



A little man enjoys being the big man for a day with Edge (top, center), Cryme Tyme (top, right), and other big WWE stars



Shy at first, Jeremy quickly warms up to his hero



Cena signs a few autographs for Jeremy

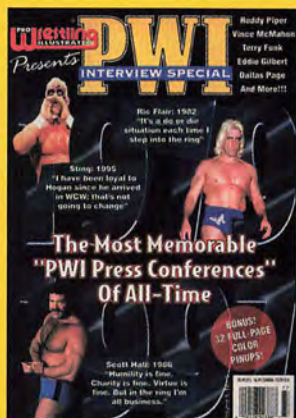


Jeremy gives his idol a gift

“ When he returned home to Lakemont, Georgia, Jeremy returned to business as usual, but the memory of that single day in San Antonio with his hero keeps him smiling despite the struggles of his illness. ”

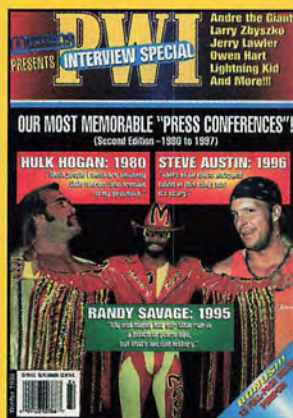
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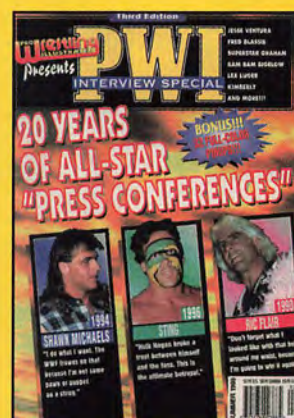
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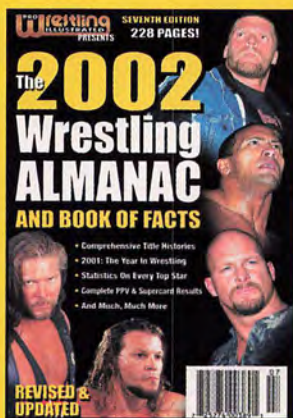
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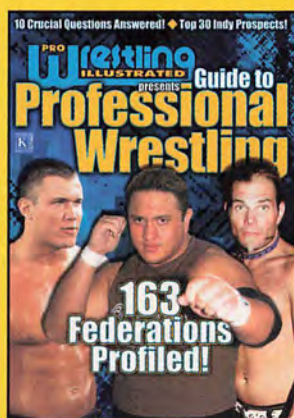
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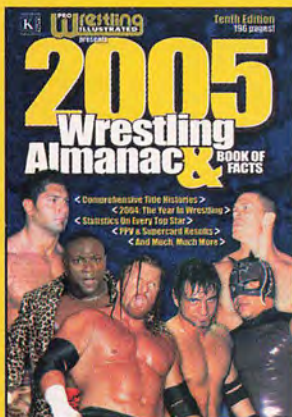
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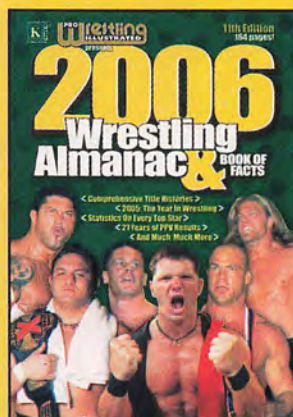
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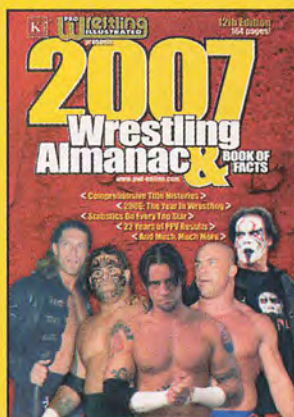
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FLYING SOLO!

Is A.J.

*Determined to
Shed His Last
TNA Allies?*

A.J. Styles is charting a self-destructive course in TNA, getting between Kurt and Karen Angle and recklessly endangering himself to "do the right thing." But is this a war A.J. should wage by himself?

BY DAN MURPHY

PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

THERE IS AN old saying that A.J. Styles would be well served to learn: "If you chase two rabbits, both will escape." For the past two years, Styles has been simultaneously chasing many different rabbits, and they always seem to get away from him.



After donning a ridiculous costume and playing court jester in TNA (second to Eric Young, of course), A.J. Styles has finally abandoned his ill-received attempts at humor and is back to being the intense fighter that earned him the name "Mr. TNA" three years in a row.

He tried to serve both Christian Cage and Kurt Angle, and ended up losing the trust of both. He split his attention between maintaining his tenuous grasp on the tag team title with Tomko and defending his status as the "Prince Of Phenomenal," which led to several embarrassing singles losses and the loss of the TNA tag title.

Once TNA's franchise star, the three-time NWA heavyweight champion has spent far too long languishing in the mid-card ranks while Sting, Samoa Joe, Angle, Cage, and Booker T leapfrogged him to the main-event level. He's chasing rabbits, but

they're just leading him around in circles and keeping him away from the only "rabbit" he should be after: the TNA World title.

The only thing holding Styles back from TNA's upper echelon is Styles himself, who continues to make one poor decision after another. Now he's on the cusp of making the most foolhardy decision of his career, and the ramifications could be disastrous, both for Styles and for TNA.

The metaphorical rabbit Styles currently is chasing is Angle. He wants to be the gallant and chivalrous white

knight coming to the aid of the damsel in distress, making a stand for Kurt's estranged wife, Karen. His cause may be noble, but he's taking a destructive course of action. Styles is so blinded by hatred for Angle that he doesn't seem to realize he has alienated his friends and is entering into a personal feud with arguably the greatest wrestler of this era, as well as Angle's allies Tomko, Frank Trigg, and Team 3D.

At Victory Road, Styles allied himself with Cage and Rhino, but that team was a marriage of convenience. Cage certainly hasn't forgotten how Styles

unwittingly caused the collapse of Christian's Coalition by siding up to Angle. Hardly a trustworthy individual on his best day, Cage isn't likely to provide much more help in Styles' one-man war against the Angle Alliance.

As for Rhino, like most of the TNA locker room, he still doesn't know exactly where Karen Angle really stands.

"Look, the things Kurt has said about his wife are just inexcusable, and I don't blame A.J. one bit for getting hot about that," Rhino said. "But ask Samoa Joe what happened when he tried to stand up for Karen against Kurt. This is maybe the third time in the past year or so that Kurt and Karen have been fighting, but they always seem to swerve everybody

and get right back together.

"If Kurt was ever to raise his hand against her, I'd be out there in a heartbeat knocking him into next week. But I've got no interest in getting in the middle of a dispute between husband and wife. It's not my place."

And it's not Styles' place, either.

For the first four years of TNA's existence, Styles was the most marketable star in the

promotion. A homegrown superstar, Styles won the X division title an unprecedented six times. He won the World title three times. He won the tag team title five times with four different partners. For three consecutive years (2003, 2004, and 2005), he was named "Mr. TNA" in an online fan poll.

Along with Jeff Jarrett, Styles was the face of the promotion. One of the most exciting and athletically gifted wrestlers in the sport, Styles was one of TNA's crown jewels. He was a competitor who won over fans and helped put TNA on the map.

But Styles has failed to seriously contend for the TNA World title since he last held the company's top championship (then the NWA heavyweight title) back in 2005. To illustrate just how far he has dropped, Booker T mistook Styles for a lost fan when he entered Booker's dressing room earlier this summer on *Impact*.

Properly promoted, Styles vs. Angle is a dream match, perhaps the biggest match in TNA history. It's a match that could get Styles' career on track and put him back into World title contention. It's a match that Styles needs and a match that TNA needs.

But no one needs to see Styles risk serious injury over another man's wife.

"Both A.J. and Karen have told me that there has never been any sort of romantic relationship between them, and I believe that," said TNA announcer Mike Tenay. "But, right or wrong, that's not how Kurt sees things. I worry about A.J., because this situation



It seems Styles can't make up his mind; he jumped back and forth between backing Christian Cage and Kurt Angle, and now he isn't backing anyone, insisting that he fight Angle alone. But fighting Angle's Alliance solo will only get him in to more trouble.



Styles and Karen Angle insist there has never been a romantic relationship between them, despite some very suspicious behavior (below). Without having anyone to watch his back in TNA, Styles is likely to find himself wrapped up in more dangerous situations with the Olympian (left).

has gotten very personal very quickly, and I could see Kurt trying to break A.J.'s leg—or worse—to send a message.”

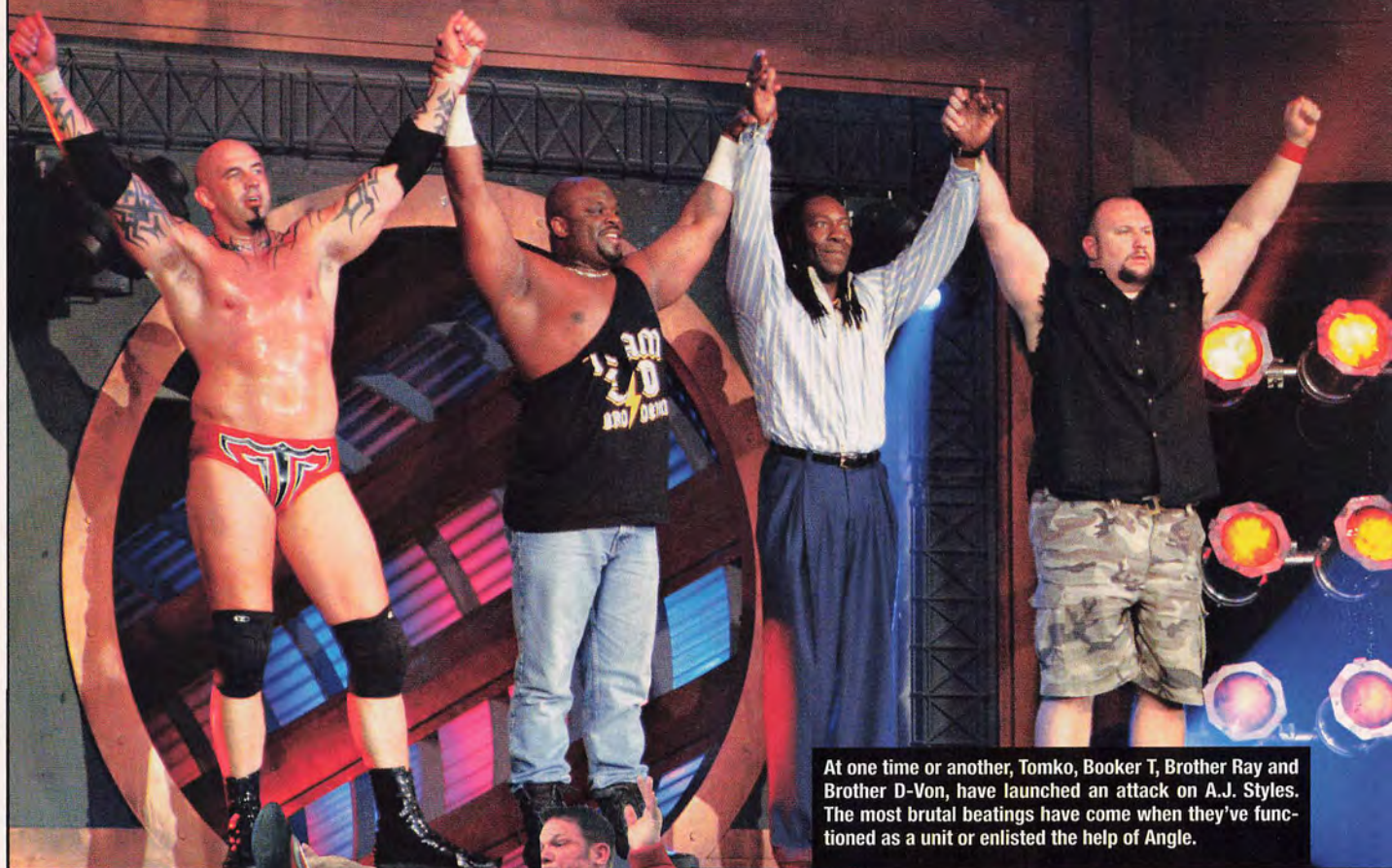
Angle and Styles aren't looking to deliver five-star classics in this blood feud. Styles is trying to defend Karen's honor, and Kurt is trying to mete out vengeance on Styles. Because of the intensely personal nature of the feud, most of their matches to date have been marred by outside interference. On a few occasions, Angle, Trigg, and Tomko have left Styles a bloody mess. Angle doesn't care about winning these matches—he only cares about inflicting as much pain as possible on Styles. Not only does that put Styles at extreme risk, but it also robs TNA of the marquee match these two could have under different circumstances ... say, with the TNA World title at stake.



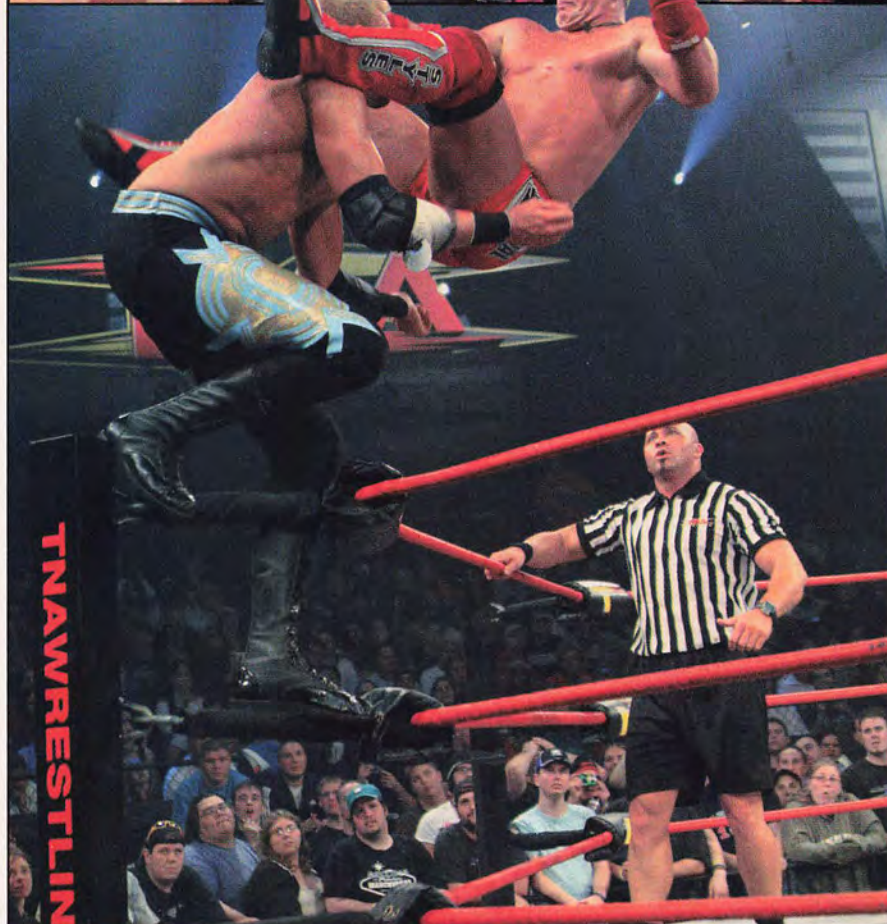
On top of that, Styles doesn't seem to have an exit strategy. He really has little to gain in this feud. Ultimately, Kurt and Karen will either mend their relationship or the will go their separate ways. If Styles' relationship with Karen is really

platonic in nature, where does that leave him? What is he really fighting for? If he can't answer that question, there's really no way he can win.

Styles has always been at his best when he has surrounded himself with



At one time or another, Tomko, Booker T, Brother Ray and Brother D-Von, have launched an attack on A.J. Styles. The most brutal beatings have come when they've functioned as a unit or enlisted the help of Angle.



Styles has received support from his occasional friend/occasional rival Christian Cage. But with such a tenuous friendship, how much will Christian be willing to sacrifice for Style's safety in TNA?

people he could trust. Christopher Daniels, Jerry Lynn, Cage, Angle—even Vince Russo at one point—were mentors and confidants for Styles. For the first time in his career, Styles has rushed headlong into a dangerous feud on his own. Those who would stand by his side—people like Rhino and others—are hesitant because of the Angles' past history.

The "Phenomenal One," "Mr. TNA" himself, has become a man without a country. And an Olympic champion, a MMA veteran, and band of brawlers are out to annihilate him.

"I'm doing what I need to do," Styles said when asked about his war against Angle. "This is my battle. It's not about Karen, or Team 3D, or Trigg, or anyone else. This is about me standing up for myself and doing the right thing. Kurt may need to surround himself with goons, but I'm going to be a man and take care of business on my own."

For the first time in years, Styles is showing focus and purpose, but he's channeling that drive in the wrong direction. He has broken away from all the friends and allies who would otherwise warn him against putting himself in such a precarious position.

In this case, "doing the right thing" might be the biggest mistake of all. □

Who Is Edge's True Love?
“VICKIE’S
LUCKY IF
SHE FINISHES
THIRD!”





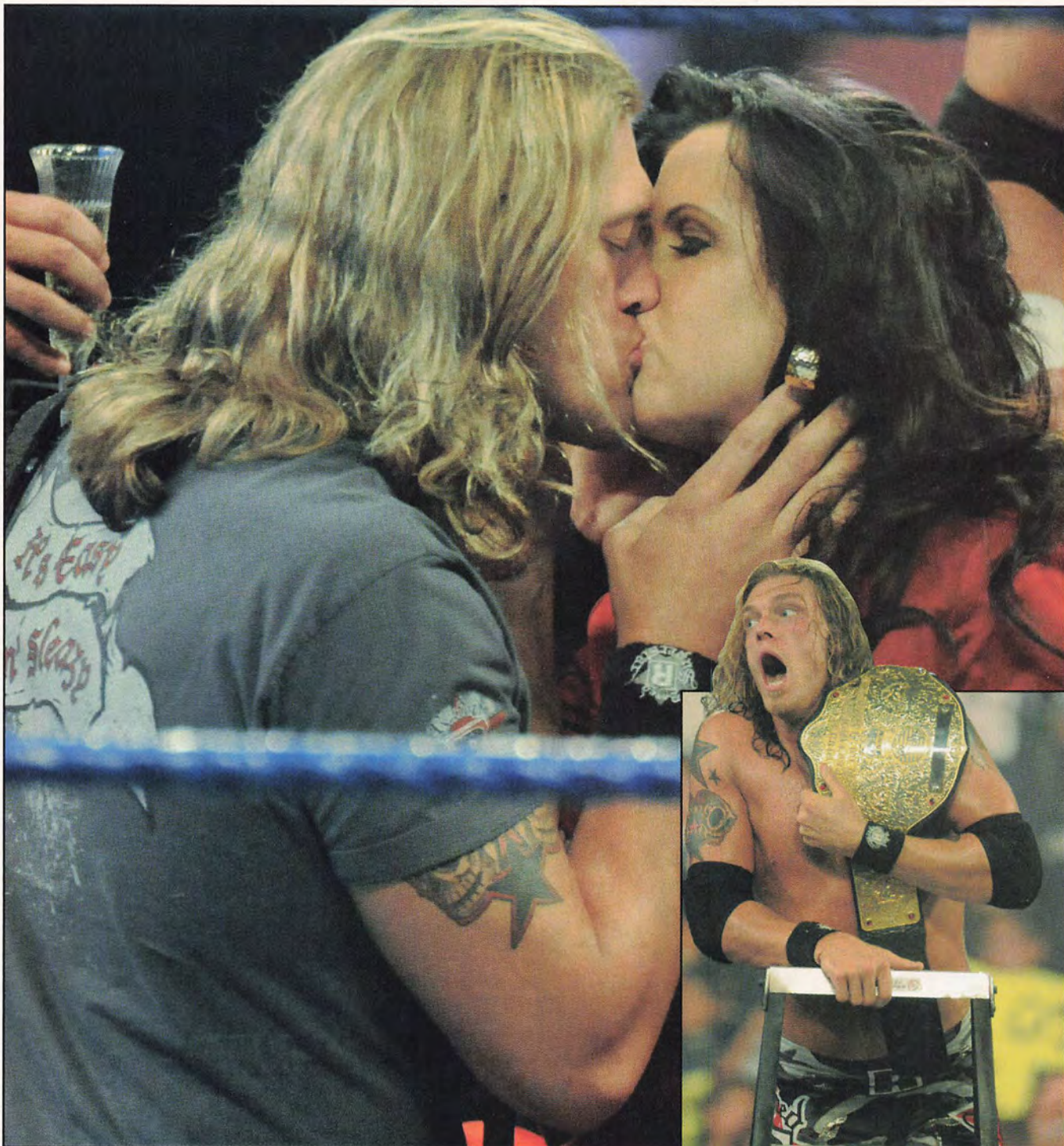
No one is fooled by Edge's proclaimed love for Vickie Guerrero—except for the Smackdown GM herself. When will Vickie realize that she ranks rather low on the “Rated R Superstar’s” list of priorities?

BY HARRY BURKETT

PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

DON'T CONFUSE LA FAMILIA with the McMahon-Helmsley Faction. Vickie Guerrero is no Stephanie McMahon. Edge is no Triple-H. Chavo Guerrero Jr. is no Shane McMahon. Hawkins and Ryder don't even qualify to be Brisco and Patterson.

Vickie and Edge are trying to re-create some of that MHF magic by portraying themselves as Smackdown's ultimate power couple, treating rank-and-file wrestlers like pawns and kissing each other ravenously whenever the camera is



Edge insists that Vickie is his true love, and he's made strides to prove his declarations of love by shoving his tongue in her mouth in front of fans at every available moment (above). But if you ask us, Edge's real passion is for gold—WWE championship gold to be exact (right).

on them. But La Familia is not about the Guerreros, Bam Neely, or Hawkins and Ryder. It's all about Edge ... and he's using all of them solely for his advantage.

Even the rest of La Familia is smart enough to realize this. When Edge and Vickie had a falling-out after Edge's World title loss to C.M. Punk, La Familia members Chavo, Hawkins, and Ryder

seized the opportunity to urge Vickie to drop the "Rated R Superstar" for good. Vickie seemed to heed their advice, forcing Edge to face The Big Show in a no-disqualification match on Smackdown.

The power-mad general manager wheeled herself to ringside to ensure that Edge received the appropriate amount of punishment for his defiance,



but when The Big Show was about to chokeslam a nearly unconscious Edge onto a set of steel steps in the middle of the ring, Vickie could no longer contain

SUCCESS BY ASSOCIATION

EDGE'S RUTHLESS CLIMB TO THE TOP

The "Rated R Superstar" has mastered the art of exploiting relationships for professional gain, often leaning on others to achieve career success. Whether as a heel or fan favorite, Edge has abided by this practice since his debut way back in 1994. Edge doesn't have friends in the wrestling business; it's more accurate to call them steppingstones. Here's a who's who of Edge's brand of networking:

Joe E. Legend: Edge teamed with Legend to form Sex & Violence and both were members of the Thug Life faction on the Detroit-Windsor independent circuit. Note that Edge did nothing to help Legend when he emerged as "Just Joe" in the WWF. Just Joe just went away.

Christian Cage: His relationship with Cage dates back to their days in Thug Life on the indy circuit, and E&C went on to win a record seven WWF World tag team titles. Cage was depicted as the heel when the two had a falling-out, but, looking back, maybe Christian was doing the heavy lifting.

The Undertaker: Talk about selling your soul. The Brood (consisting of Edge, Christian, and Gangrel) was feuding with The Acolytes (Bradshaw and Faarooq) of The Ministry of Darkness when The Brood suddenly joined The Undertaker's evil cult. 'Taker should have sacrificed Edge on the symbol when he had the chance.

Kurt Angle: Team E.C.K. had nothing to do with popular *Baltimore Sun* wrestling columnist Kevin Eck. Edge and Christian formed a short-lived alliance with Angle to boost their main-

event prospects, but ended up being humiliated by Too Cool and Rikishi. Scotty Too Hotty pinned Edge in their big PPV showdown. Ouch!

Hulk Hogan: Edge said he was living a dream when he teamed with the legendary "Hulkster" to defeat Billy and Chuck for the WWE World tag team title on July 4, 2002. The Toronto native's feelings were probably genuine, but it didn't hurt to get the rub from the 12-time world heavyweight champion.

Chris Benoit: At Taboo Tuesday, Edge proved to be the ultimate deadbeat partner. Enraged that the fans picked Shawn Michaels to vie for the World title that night, Edge abandoned partner Chris Benoit, who went on to singlehandedly win the World tag team title from La Resistance. Edge didn't mind wearing the belt, though.

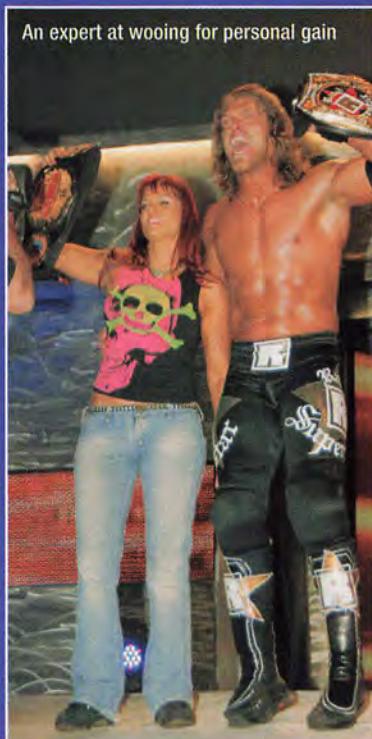
Lita: The TLC rivalry between E&C and The Hardy Boyz spawned a friendship and a bond of mutual respect between Edge and Matt Hardy ... or so we thought. It turned out that Edge had an affair with Hardy's live-in girlfriend Lita while poor Matt was recovering from knee surgery. Edge hasn't regretted his misdeed, not even a Lita-bit.

Mick Foley: Edge and Foley had nothing in common, proving that Edge will forge any alliance for the sake of temporary convenience. At One Night Stand 2006, Edge, Foley, and Lita beat Tommy Dreamer, Terry Funk, and Beulah McGillicutty. The despicable Edge pinned Beulah ... and immediately deleted Foley from his speed dial.

Randy Orton: What's the best way to eliminate a dangerous rival? Pretend to be his friend! Rated RKO won the World tag team title and waged an impressive feud against DeGeneration X, but Edge's real objective was to keep the third-generation star at his side, where he could keep his eye on him. Edge eventually betrayed this partner, too.

Vickie Guerrero: She was once viewed as a classy lady, not exactly Edge's type. Why is Edge attracted to Vickie? Is it her screechy voice? Her selfish motives? Her custom-chromed wheelchair? Or because she's Smackdown general manager? Hmmm.

—Harry Burkett



An expert at wooing for personal gain

her protective instincts, screaming for Big Show to stop the onslaught. A distraught Vickie and an exhausted Edge gazed into each other's eyes, locked lips, and explored each other's molars until Smackdown went off the air.

Watching the monitor backstage, Chavo, Hawkins, and Ryder slapped their foreheads in astonishment. They had risked everything to urge Vickie to dump Edge. Now Edge was firmly in control of La Familia again ... and he would

remember their betrayal.

"When I told Vickie to drop Edge, I meant no disrespect to Edge at all, honest truth," said Curt Hawkins. "We just thought Vickie could grow as a person if Edge gave her some space. It was all

about growth, you know.”

“Edge is a great human being,” chimed Zack Ryder. “We know, in the long run, he’ll make the perfect husband for Vickie. It was just that, after losing the belt and all, we didn’t think they were in the right frame of mind for a wedding.”

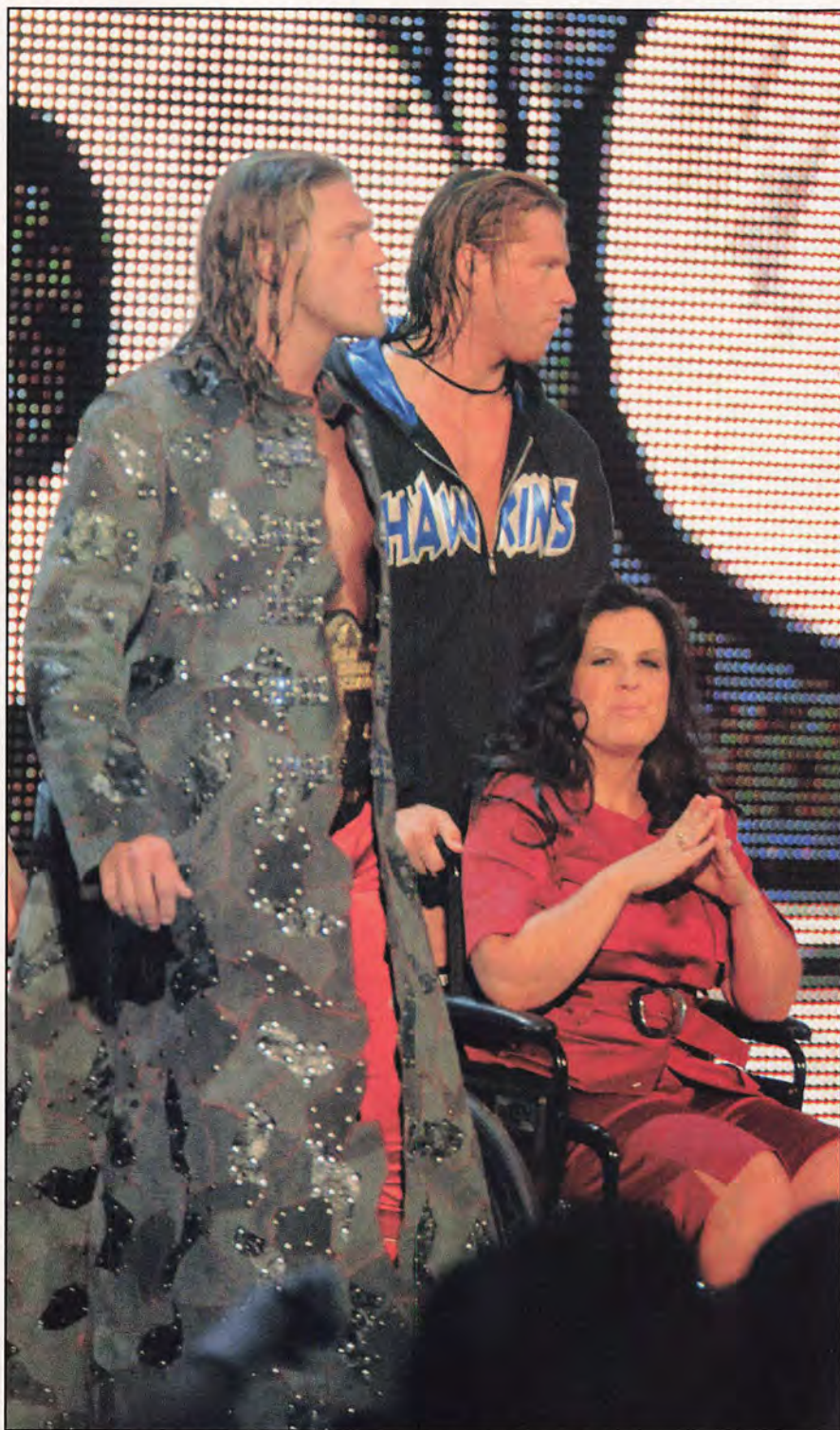
Wow. Now that’s some Tour de France-style backpedaling. The truth is that Hawkins and Ryder each see themselves as the next Edge, maybe not as Vickie’s husband, but definitely as beneficiaries of the Smackdown GM’s good graces.

“Everybody knows what Edge is all about,” mused Smackdown color commentator Mick Foley. “Hawkins and Ryder were absolutely right about Edge: He’s just using Vickie for his own ends. I’m not saying that the widow Guerrero isn’t rather fetching in her wheelchair, but I don’t exactly see the sexual chemistry between those two. Hey, I’ve been a friend and a foe of the guy, and Edge isn’t that hard to figure out. You just have to understand that Edge’s true love is himself. His second love is his career. Vickie’s lucky if she finishes third on that list.”

Foley’s take on the situation seems accurate. Edge’s priorities are clear-cut for anyone paying attention. Let’s break down those priorities:

1. HIMSELF. Most people had Edge pegged as a nice guy until his real-life affair with Lita came to light in 2005. Edge went on to flaunt that relationship in front of Lita’s jilted boyfriend, Matt Hardy. He realized that such behavior finally got him over as a heel, thereby launching him to main-event status. He didn’t care who got hurt in the process, Lita, Matt, or even his own loved ones. Edge didn’t care how he seized the spotlight, just so he was the center of attention.

2. HIS CAREER. Many ambitious individuals have admitted that a successful career does not ensure a satisfying personal life, and, in most cases, it is very difficult to have both. But that hasn’t prevented Edge from maintaining a very busy schedule designed to keep him in the main-event mix. The World and WWE titles have been his central focus at all times. No one since Triple-H has been so obsessed with procuring the gold at any cost. The current Edge-Helmsley rivalry—with “The Game’s” World title



Keeping Vickie by his side has benefited Edge immensely. But having her as an enemy could be career suicide. During their brief breakup this summer, Vickie forced her then-ex to face The Big Show. As it turned out, Vickie’s feelings for Edge ran deep enough to have mercy on him. She halted the match before Show could hurt her man.

at stake—has the potential to be the most vicious feud ever.

3. VICKIE. We’d say that Vickie is a very distant third in Edge’s list of priorities. While it’s quite possible that Vickie could be less vindictive away from the cameras, it’s very unlikely that

Edge is the sort of person who would appreciate any redeeming qualities that Vickie may possess. The obvious question is: Will Edge still cherish Vickie when she is no longer Smackdown GM?

Of course, Edge and Vickie insist that their love is pure, fueled not by

shared ambition, but by mutual desire. They insist that Triple-H and the World title are secondary to their love for each other. Their passion goes beyond the world of WWE.

"She's the love of my life, and that's all there is to it," commented a breathless Edge as he walked hurriedly out of the arena after a Smackdown taping. "Any creep who says I don't love Vickie is looking to get his head smashed. Now get outta my face."

Vickie confirmed her love for Edge in an official press release from the Smackdown general manager's office: "Smackdown's loyal viewers witnessed a beautifully romantic moment at the conclusion of our July 11 broadcast.

Many fans have expressed concern that our planned matrimony will not take place. I assure everyone that the grandest wedding ceremony in sports entertainment history will occur. Please monitor wwe.com for more details in the weeks ahead."

Indeed, the nuptials took place on July 18, 2008. But, at the reception, Triple-H proved what everyone—except Vickie—had anticipated. As a wedding gift, Trips showed a video of Edge with the couple's wedding planner Alicia Fox. The video had been taken the day before the wedding. But will this revelation be enough to convince Vickie that Edge's love for her is a fraud? Our instinct tells us no. □

La Familia is not the tight-knit unit they appear to be. When La Familia saw the chance to convince Vickie to ditch the "Rated R Superstar" for their own chance at success, they stepped up to the plate. It seems that selfish birds of a feather flock together.



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THE WRESTLING ANALYST

CHRIS JERICHO

Years Pro: 18

Size: 5'10", 225 lbs.

"PWI 500" Listings: 2008—29

2005—25

2004—10

2003—5

2002—4

2001—9

2000—9

1999—29

1998—10

1997—26

1996—42

Titles: NWA World middleweight championship

ECW TV championship

WCW cruiserweight championship (4 times)

WCW TV championship

WCW World heavyweight championship (2 times)

WWF championship

WWF European championship

WWF/E Intercontinental championship (8 times)

WWF/E World tag team championship (3 times)

PWI Awards: 2004 Feud of the Year (2nd Runner-Up)

2003 Match of the Year (3rd Runner-Up)

2002 Most Hated Wrestler of the Year (Winner)

2001 Match of the Year (2nd Runner-Up)

2001 Most Inspirational Wrestler of the Year (1st Runner-Up)

2001 Most Popular Wrestler of the Year (2nd Runner-Up)

2000 Match of the Year (1st Runner-Up)

2000 Most Popular Wrestler of the Year (2nd Runner-Up)

[THE NUMBERS]

Offense (9.0): During his WCW feud with Dean Malenko, Jericho often boasted that he was the "Man Of 1,004 Holds." It's an exaggeration, of course (he counted "armbar" multiple times), but it isn't a drastic exaggeration. Jericho is one of the most gifted, crafty, and scrappy performers ever to lace a pair of boots. He can make you tap out (Walls of Jericho), he can bombard you from the air (lionsault), he can knock you silly (codebreaker) and—as if that weren't enough—he can hurt your feelings with a barrage of verbal abuse.

Defense: (8.5): Jericho is routinely out-muscled by bigger opponents, and occasionally out-paced by more sprightly ones. His not-too-big, not-too-small physique makes him a tremendous all-around wrestler. But in an industry dominated by extremes, he's sometimes at a disadvantage. Quick-thinking opponents will raise their knees when Jericho leaps off the ropes for the lionsault to take all the wind out of Jericho's sails. Jericho is, however, a brilliant tactician who has learned that there's no shame in rolling out of the ring for a breather.

Experience (10.0): Like it says in the sub-title of Jericho's autobiography, *A Lion's Tale*, Jericho has truly been "around the world in spandex" over the past 18 years. He has excelled in every style of wrestling worldwide: the high-flying lucha genre of Mexico, the intense, no-frills style of Japan, and the sports-entertainment brand of North America in which a big attitude means as much as a big body. As a graduate of the Hart family Dungeon and a veteran of promoter Tony Condello's "Hell Tours" in the frozen tundra of northern Canada, Jericho has paid his dues many times over.

Conditioning (9.5): Even after 18 years, Jericho still has the tenacity of a hungry rookie with something to prove. He's in magnificent shape, and maintained his athletic physique during his recent hiatus from wrestling. There's plenty of muscle packed onto his compact frame but not at the expense of speed or endurance for this all-around athlete.

Science (10.0): Jericho is a chameleon in the ring, able to adapt to seemingly any opponent, in any match type. He learned the fundamentals in Calgary, the aerial work in Mexico, ring prowess in Japan, and he mixes it all with his own unique style and charisma. Watch carefully next time you see him in the ring: His every move is deliberate, concise, and usually effective. Wannabe wrestlers can only hope he'll someday open a school; it will be wrestling's Harvard.

Stamina (9.0): In the ring, Jericho has the relentless reserves of the Energizer Bunny. When he does lose, it's rarely due to a lack of stamina; it's often a lack of composure. He sometimes becomes visibly frustrated late in a match when things aren't going his way, and his concentration suffers. He has matured over the years, but the tantrums still sometimes get the better of him.

Power (7.5): In any setting other than WWE, Jericho would be considered a heavily muscled and powerful man. But in the land of Goliaths, Jericho is a David. You'll rarely see him attempt a press slam, nor other moves that require feats of brute strength. Wisely, he sticks to moves that utilize momentum, finesse, and strategy. Based on his success (can you say first-ever undisputed champion?), it's clear that power doesn't always equal prowess.

Speed (9.0): While Jericho may not bounce about like a cruiserweight as much these days, he's no less quick. He's just smarter about it. It only takes a split second for Jericho to pounce with his new codebreaker finisher. Jericho's speed is not just a physical attribute; he's quick-thinking, which is what makes him so dangerous.

Quality of Opposition (10.0): Name any top-tier wrestler from the past 15 years or so; Jericho has wrestled and probably beaten him. Austin, Rock, Triple-H, Angle ... and so on. He has wrestled midgets (a faux Goldberg), women (Chyna), masked lucha-style wrestlers (Ultimo Dragon, et. al), and his closest friends (Lance Storm). Having won essentially every major title there is to be won, Jericho has beaten the very best in the business, which, of course, cements his legacy as one of the all-time greats.

Despite his smaller size, Jericho packs enough punch in his 5'10" frame to offset larger opponents. Y2J's speed and energy can keep men, such as the 6'5" Randy Orton, off-balance.

①



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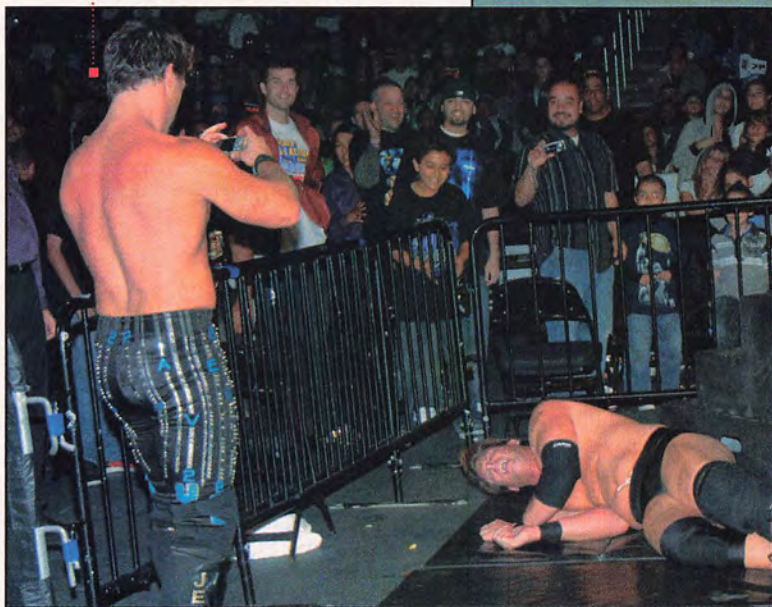
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- ② He might not be the man of exactly "1,004 Holds," but Chris Jericho's ring work is pretty well-rounded. He carries in his repertoire the lionsault, the codebreaker, and his famous Walls of Jericho (right). And when none of those moves work, Y2J unleashes one of his most brutal weapons: humiliation (below).



- ③ Jericho's skills far outweigh the power of his bigger opponents, making him capable of battling a greater variety of opponents. His title history proves his wrestling acumen. He most recently held the Intercontinental title in WWE (right), but he is best known for his reign as the first WWF undisputed champion.



- ④ Y2J is capricious to say the least. In just one year, Jericho went from being a candidate for the Most Popular and the Most Inspirational Wrestler of the Year awards in 2001 to being voted the Most Hated Wrestler of the Year in 2002. Jericho's sudden and dramatic mood swings sometimes hurt him in the ring.



[THE ANALYSIS]

Repertoire: The self-proclaimed “Man Of 1,004 Holds” may overestimate his repertoire at times, but barely. Whether in a ring, a steel cage, an elimination chamber, or an all-out melee, Jericho has the skills to come out on top. His fundamentals are exceptional (Hart Dungeon graduates learned the basics as well as anyone), and he has an array of submission and aerial moves that make him a dangerous foe in any situation. He’s one of only a handful of wrestlers who is just as likely to win a match by submission or pinfall, depending on the finisher he chooses to employ.

Strengths: Jericho is not short of confidence, which more than makes up for his slightly smaller-than-average physique. What’s more, he has the in-ring prowess and experience to back up even his most grandiose boasts. He’s fearless, driven, and unrelenting—not to mention a master of the microphone.

Weaknesses: It could be said that Jericho’s greatest strength is also his most debilitating weakness: his confidence. There’s a fine line between being confident and being an egomaniac, and it’s a line Jericho has been known to trip over. His self-confidence can quickly turn into self-defeat when things don’t go the way he envisioned. Jericho gets too easily frustrated, and still throws the occasional tantrum, which can quickly spell demise in a match.

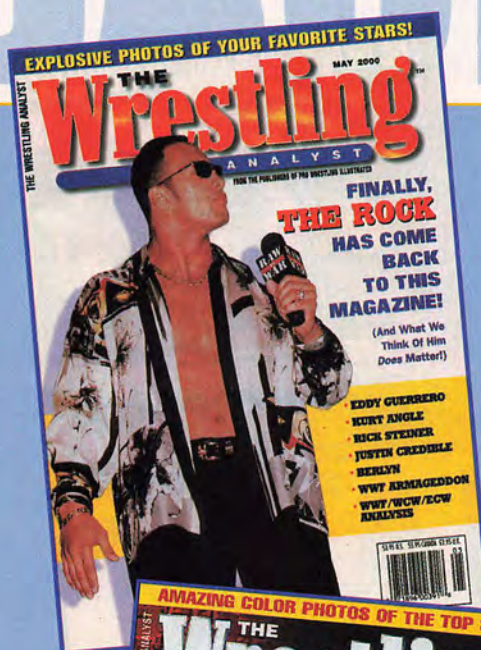
Defining Career Moment: Without question, Jericho’s victory on December 9, 2001, vaulted him into wrestling’s history books, where he’ll forever be enshrined as the first-ever WWF undisputed champion. Jericho was the clear underdog going into the three-way match, as most pundits had their money on either The Rock or “Stone-Cold” Steve Austin to take the gold. Jericho’s victory was a Cinderella story, and a pinnacle moment in a career full of high-points.

Future: After a self-imposed hiatus from the ring, Jericho is back and doesn’t seem to have missed a beat. He’s lean, he’s aggressive, and he apparently has a lot of fight left in him. It won’t be long before Jericho marks his 20-year anniversary in the wrestling business; don’t be surprised if he also celebrates another world championship victory at the same time.

THE Wrestling ANALYST

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- ☐ Sept. 1999: Sable, Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Juventud Guerrera, Jerry Lynn, Bossman, Norman Smiley, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ Nov. 1999: Sting, Godfather, Super Crazy, Darren Drozdov, Horace Hogan, Great American Bash, WWF-WCW-ECW.
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- ☐ July 2000: Rikishi, Test, Madusa, Mike Awesome, Meng, Albert, Royal Rumble, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ Sept. 2000: Chris Jericho, Edge, Tommy Dreamer, Terry Funk, Rhino, WrestleMania, WWF-WCW-ECW.

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OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

- 1 **TRIPLE-H**
269, Greenwich, CT
(2) **WWE heavyweight champion**
- 2 **C.M. PUNK**
210, Chicago, IL
(-) **WWE World champion**
- 3 **SAMOA JOE**
290, Samoa
(1) **TNA World champion**
- 4 **BATISTA**
318, Washington, DC
(-) **No. 1 contender: WWE World title**
- 5 **BOOKER T**
250, Houston, TX
(-) **No. 1 contender: TNA World title**
- 6 **THE GREAT KHALI**
420, Bombay, India
(-) **No.1 contender: WWE title**
- 7 **SUWAMA**
260, Fujisawa, Japan
(8) **All Japan Triple Crown champion**
- 8 **MARK HENRY**
380, Silsbee, TX
(-) **ECW heavyweight champion**
- 9 **KEIJI MUTO**
245, Yamanashi, Japan
(10) **IWGP champion**
- 10 **MATT HARDY**
213, Cameron, NC
(-) **No.1 contender: ECW title**



The Great Khali

TAG TEAMS

- 1 **HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ**
Combined weight: 515 pounds
(3) **TNA World tag team champions**
- 2 **TED DIBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES**
Combined weight: 467 pounds
(-) **WWE World tag team champions**
- 3 **CURT HAWKINS & ZACK RYDER**
Combined weight: 435 pounds
(-) **WWE heavyweight tag team champions**
- 4 **JAMES STORM & ROBERT ROODE**
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(-) **No. 1 contenders: TNA World tag team title**
- 5 **JIMMY JACOBS & TYLER BLACK**
Combined weight: 379 pounds
(10) **ROH tag team champions**
- 6 **PHOENIX STAR & ZOKRE**
Combined weight: 328 pounds
(8) **NWA tag team champions**
- 7 **ERIC PEREZ & EDDIE COLON**
Combined weight: 456 pounds
(9) **FCW tag team champions**
- 8 **TOGI MAKABE & TORU YANO**
Combined weight: 488 pounds
(5) **IWGP tag team champions**
- 9 **TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI**
Combined weight: 434 pounds
(-) **AJPW universal tag team champions**
- 10 **BROTHER RAY & BROTHER DEVON**
Combined weight: 579 pounds
(6) **No. 2 contenders: TNA World tag team title**

WWE RAW

World Champion:

- C.M. PUNK**
(-) 210, Chicago, IL
- 1—**BATISTA**
(-) 318, Washington, DC
 - 2—**JOHN B. LAYFIELD**
(2) 309, Roscoe, TX
 - 3—**JOHN CENA**
(3) 260, West Newbury, MA
 - 4—**KOFI KINGSTON**
(-) 225, Jamaica
 - 5—**CHRIS JERICHO**
(4) 220, Winnipeg, Manitoba
 - 6—**SHAWN MICHAELS**
(5) 217, San Antonio, TX
 - 7—**PAUL BIRCHALL**
(-) 268, Surrey, England
 - 8—**KANE**
(-) 326, St. Louis, MO
 - 9—**REY MYSTERIO JR.**
(-) 163, San Diego, CA
 - 10—**SANTINO MARELLA**
(-) 227, Calabria, Italy

SMACKDOWN

Heavyweight Champion:

- TRIPLE-H**
(-) 269, Greenwich, CT
- 1—**THE GREAT KHALI**
(-) 420, Bombay, India
 - 2—**EDGE**
(2) 240, Toronto, Ontario
 - 3—**SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(-) 245, Minneapolis, MN
 - 4—**JEFF HARDY**
(-) 212, Cameron, NC
 - 5—**KEN KENNEDY**
(-) 246, Green Bay, WI
 - 6—**UMAGA**
(-) 348, Samoa
 - 7—**MVP**
(5) 252, Miami, FL
 - 8—**VLADIMIR KOZLOV**
(9) 310, Moscow, Russia
 - 9—**THE BIG SHOW**
(-) 485, Aiken, SC
 - 10—**BRIAN KENDRICK**
(-) 175, Fairfax, VA

ECW

Champion:

- MARK HENRY**
(-) 380, Silsbee, TX
- 1—**MATT HARDY**
(-) 213, Cameron, NC
 - 2—**TOMMY DREAMER**
(9) 260, Yonkers, NY
 - 3—**CHAVO GUERRERO JR.**
(2) 210, El Paso, TX
 - 4—**FINLAY**
(-) 230, Belfast, Ireland
 - 5—**THE MIZ**
(3) 210, Parma, OH
 - 6—**EVAN BOURNE**
(-) 177, St. Louis, MO
 - 7—**MIKE KNOX**
(7) 260, Amarillo, TX
 - 8—**JOHN MORRISON**
(8) 204, Hanover, WV
 - 9—**STEVIE RICHARDS**
(10) 225, Philadelphia, PA
 - 10—**COLIN DELANEY**
(-) 172, Rochester, NY

TNA

World Champion:

- SAMOA JOE**
(C) 290, Samoa
- 1—**BOOKER T**
(5) 250, Houston, TX
 - 2—**KURT ANGLE**
(3) 233, Pittsburgh, PA
 - 3—**A.J. STYLES**
(8) 202, Gainesville, GA
 - 4—**ALEX SHELLEY**
(-) 199, Detroit, MI
 - 5—**PETEY WILLIAMS**
(2) 179, Windsor, Ontario
 - 6—**KAZ**
(4) 215, Yucca Valley, CA
 - 7—**MATT MORGAN**
(7) 330, Fairfield, CT
 - 8—**BROTHER RAY**
(-) 319, Massapequa, NY
 - 9—**CHRISTIAN CAGE**
(-) 239, Toronto, Ontario
 - 10—**RHINO**
(-) 275, Detroit, MI

Top 10 and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED JULY 28, 2008

AWESOME: Champion—Falah; 1—Justin Corino; 2—Steve Camacho; 3—Mark Modest; 4—Dan Rameous; 5—Biggie Biggs; 6—Lord Jasin Karloff; 7—Jay Blaze; 8—Robby Morrison; 9—Vik Voorhees; 10—Doctor K.

CHIKARA: Champion—Fire Ant; 1—Claudio Castagnoli; 2—Vin Gerard; 3—Hallowicked; 4—Delirious; 5—Mike Quackenbush; 6—Brodie Lee; 7—Eddie Kingston; 8—Lince Dorado; 9—Mitch Ryder; 10—Incognito.

COMBAT ZONE WRESTLING: Champion—Nick Gage; 1—Drake Younger; 2—D.J. Hyde; 3—Brain Damage; 4—Danny Havoc; 5—Chuck Taylor; 6—Pinkie Sanchez; 7—Sabian; 8—Ruckus; 9—Dylan Summers; 10—Scotty Vortekz.

GLOBAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Dusty Dillinger; 1—Steve Stone; 2—Brian Beech; 3—Stamp Lickage; 4—Sherman Tank; 5—Brandon Blaze; 6—Hardcore Craig; 7—The Postmaster; 8—Mr. Old School; 9—Matt Mason; 10—Robby Star.

MARYLAND CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Christian York; 1—Ruckus; 2—Joey Matthews; 3—The Bruiser; 4—Adam Flash; 5—Josh Daniels; 6—Delirious; 7—Derek Frazier; 8—Devon Storm; 9—Claudio Castagnoli; 10—Rhett Titus.

MID-SOUTH PRO WRESTLING: Champion—The Atomic Dogg; 1—Steve Williams; 2—Gary Gram; 3—Prince Al Farat; 4—Matt Riviera; 5—Jeff Jett; 6—Eric Wayne; 7—Bruiser Rick Sweetan; 8—Kid Nikels; 9—Mark Johnson; 10—Greg King Jr.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Todd Hill; 1—Samu; 2—John Rambo; 3—The Patriot; 4—Chris Cline; 5—Blackhawk; 6—Doink the Clown; 7—Rocky Dicola; 8—Brandon Scott; 9—Tony Atlas; 10—Leslie Leatherman.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Ron Zombie; 1—Xavier; 2—Samoa Joe; 3—Booker T; 4—Jerry Lawler; 5—Scott Steiner; 6—Joey Matthews; 7—Jason Blade; 8—Christian Cage; 9—Jeff Starr; 10—Kurt Adonis.

PRO WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—Jey Graham; 1—Shane Valentine; 2—Kage; 3—Johnny Graham; 4—The Patriot; 5—Leslie Leatherman; 6—Bill Bain; 7—Demolition Ax; 8—Jackpot; 9—Ian Jordan; 10—Commander Samuel A. Wellington.

REVOLUTIONARY CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Tank; 1—BoneCrusher; 2—Deranged; 3—Suicidal Youth; 4—Southside Brawler; 5—Ryan Lee; 6—Hamhock; 7—Hambone #1; 8—E.Z. Ryder; 9—Hambone #2; 10—Crazy Train.

WEST-TEXAS WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Chad Thomas; 1—Preston James; 2—Dameon Blood; 3—Brian Blade; 4—Tony Morales; 5—El Gringo Loco; 6—Raul Torrez; 7—Rage; 8—Violent V.; 9—Shane Garrett; 10—Jordan Calubs.

WORLD CLASS EXTREME WRESTLING: Champion—Corey Edsel; 1—Hangtime; 2—Cletus Bass; 3—K.C. McKnight; 4—Tracy Gilbert; 5—Bobby Wohlfert; 6—Dillinger; 7—Aaron Devil; 8—Kid Evil; 9—Shaq Knox; 10—D.Z. Hyde.

RING OF HONOR

Champion:

NIGEL McGUINNESS

(C) 220, London, England

1—BRYAN DANIELSON

(2) 185, Aberdeen, WA

2—AUSTIN ARIES

(6) 202, Milwaukee, WI

3—TYLER BLACK

(-) 210, Davenport, IA

4—GO SHIOZAKI

(8) 220, Tokyo, Japan

5—RODERICK STRONG

(5) 205, Tampa, FL

6—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(-) 202, Othello, WA

7—JIMMY JACOBS

(-) 173, Grand Rapids, MI

8—CHRIS HERO

(-) 240, Dayton, OH

9—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI

(1) 232, Schaffhausen, Switzerland

10—ERICK STEVENS

(4) 231, Sarasota, FL

NWA

Champion:

ADAM PEARCE

(-) 248, San Diego, CA

1—BRENT ALBRIGHT

(1) 238, Tulsa, OK

2—BLUE DEMON JR.

(2) 216, Mexico City, Mexico

3—KEIJI MUTO

(3) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

4—MIKE DiBIASE

(4) 220, Amarillo, TX

5—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(5) 245, Kyoto, Japan

6—T.J. PERKINS

(7) 210, Kansas City, MO

7—SEAN WALTMAN

(8) 212, Minneapolis, MN

8—ROB CONWAY

(6) 238, New Albany, IN

9—CRUSHER HANSON

(10) 260, Strongsville, OH

10—CARL OULLETE

(-) 245, Montreal, Quebec

JAPAN

1—KEIJI MUTO

(1) 245, Yamanashi, Japan

IWGP champion

2—TAKESHI MORISHIMA

(3) 297, Tokyo, Japan

GHC champion

3—SUWAMA

(2) 260, Fujisawa, Japan

All Japan Triple Crown champion

4—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(-) 245, Kyoto, Japan

5—MANABU NAKANISHI

(-) 265, Kyoto, Japan

6—YOSHINOBU KANEMARU

(10) 187, Kofu City, Japan

7—MINORU SUZUKI

(6) 220, Yokohama, Japan

8—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI

(7) 211, Saitama, Japan

9—TIGER MASK IV

(-) 190, Chiba, Japan

10—CIMA

(9) 176, Sakai City, Japan

Open the Dream Gate champion

MEXICO

1—DOS CARAS JR.

(1) 211, San Luis Potos, Mexico

2—DR. WAGNER JR.

(2) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

3—MISTICO

(3) 177, Mexico City, Mexico

4—PERRO AGUAYO JR.

(4) 200, Zacatecas, Mexico

5—JUDAS MESIAS

(5) 245, Bayamon, Puerto Rico

6—ATLANTIS

(6) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

7—LIZMARK JR.

(7) 262, Acapulco, Mexico

8—MEPHISTO

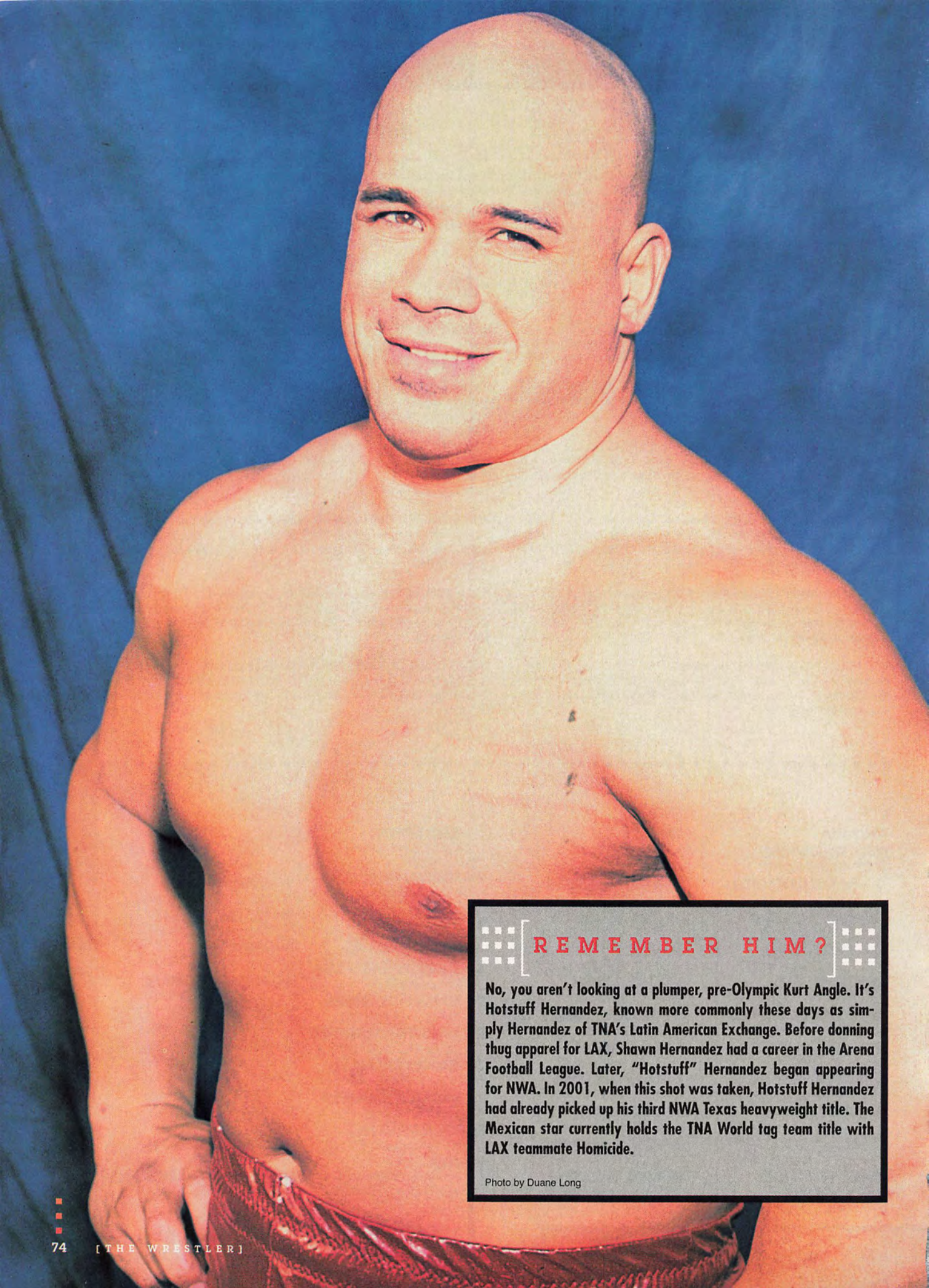
(8) 200, Mexico City, Mexico

9—HECTOR GARZA

(9) 220, Monterrey, Mexico

10—EL HIJO DEL SANTO

(10) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico



REMEMBER HIM?

No, you aren't looking at a plumper, pre-Olympic Kurt Angle. It's Hotstuff Hernandez, known more commonly these days as simply Hernandez of TNA's Latin American Exchange. Before donning thug apparel for LAX, Shawn Hernandez had a career in the Arena Football League. Later, "Hotstuff" Hernandez began appearing for NWA. In 2001, when this shot was taken, Hotstuff Hernandez had already picked up his third NWA Texas heavyweight title. The Mexican star currently holds the TNA World tag team title with LAX teammate Homicide.

Photo by Duane Long



check out this shot!

D.H. Smith slams Paul Birchall to the mat with a belly-to-back suplex. Smith seemingly channels the power and agility of his late father, Davey Boy Smith, each time he enters the ring. This exhibition of raw power suggests this "Canadian Bulldog" is as capable of taking on WWE's top talent as his famous father was. Harry's potential is undeniable, especially considering his pedigree. He has more wrestling in his blood than just about any other star in WWE—except maybe his cousin Natalya, who's preoccupied with Michelle McCool these days.

Photo by George Napolitano

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!

THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING

Okay, it was an experiment. We took a gamble. Nobody had ever thought of binding two magazines, back cover to back cover, and selling them as one package. It wouldn't have worked with most magazines, but *The Wrestler* and *Inside Wrestling* have been so closely associated for the last 40 years, we thought it just might work. Well, it did! Reader response has been overwhelmingly positive. So if you missed the combination issues we've published so far, here's a chance to order them.

Vol. 2, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "The Angle Zone: Enter At Your Own Risk!" **60-Minute Interview:** Bob Orton Jr. **Also Inside:** Booker T, Michaels-Christian, A.J. Styles, Ray "Big Bossman" Traylor. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Edge Of Insanity! Has He Ruined His Future?" **Also Inside:** Scott D'Amore, Paul London, Orlando Jordan, Joey Matthews, Kim Neilson, Kenny Bolin, Dunn & Marcos, Simon Dean, Mana, Kane-Snitsky, Magnus & Daivari, Pat Kenney.

Vol. 3, 2005: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Hogan Steals WrestleMania!" **60-Minute Interview:** Terry Funk. **Also Inside:** Cornette vs. Heenan, Petey Williams, 10 unforgettable WrestleMania moments. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "WrestleMania 21: The Real Winners & Losers." **Also Inside:** Alexis Laree, Lance Hoyt, Shane Twins, Jack Evans, Val Venis, Arch Kincaid, Mike Mondo, Alere Littlefeather, Jeff Hammond, O.C. Boyz, Shawn Michaels.

Vol. 5, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Our Demand To The IOC: Strip Angle Of His Medal!" **60-Minute Interview:** George Steele. **Also Inside:** Randy Orton, Bobby Lashley, Ken Kennedy. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Christian's TNA Gamble: If He Wins, Everybody Wins." **Also Inside:** Aaron Stevens, Homicide, Boogeyman, Raven-Riley, Talia & April, Rory & Robbie McAllister, Colt Cabana, Mickie James.

Vol. 7, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Rey Mysterio Jr.: Too Much Man For His Own Good?" **60-Minute Interview:** J.J. Dillon. **Also Inside:** Kane, Styles-Daniels-Joe, Teddy Hart. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Sting Or Steve: The Makeup On A Man Or ... The Make Up Of A Man." **Also Inside:** Brent Albright, Nattie Neidhart, Paul Burchall, Jay Lethal, Bobby Roode, Jimmy Rave, Ruckus, Kid Kash.

Vol. 9, 2006: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Big Brother" Batista: "Anybody Who Abused Rey Will Pay!" **60-Minute Interview:** Harley Race. **Also Inside:** DeGeneration X, Trish-Mickie,

Chris Sabin. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** Extreme Success: "One Night That Changed The Face Of Wrestling." **Also Inside:** Chris Masters, Eric Young, Alex Shelley, A1, David Young, Sonjay Dutt, The Naturals, Matt Bentley, Elix Skipper, Homicide, Johnny Devine.

Vol. 11, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Blame Sting! He Could Have Prevented The War With Christian!" **90-Minute Interview:** Bobby Heenan. **Also Inside:** Paul Heyman, Finlay & Regal, Mick Foley. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Trish Stratus Tribute Cover." **Also Inside:** Lita, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards.

Vol. 13, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "DeGeneration X-Plosion! Brace Yourself For The HHH vs. HBK Feud!" **90-Minute Interview:** Paul Orndorff. **Also Inside:** WSX, Christian-Edge-Rhino, Bobby Lashley. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "WrestleMania Time Capsules—WWE's Biggest Event Through The Years." **Also Inside:** Sting.

Vol. 15, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "WWE Overhaul! Our Plan To Shuffle The Deck." **90-Minute Interview:** Larry Zbyszko. **Also Inside:** McMahon & ECW, Mike Awesome, Colon-Flair. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "What's Up With A.J.? Some Words Of Wisdom From A Man Who Knows." **Also Inside:** Bobby Lashley, stars' greatest covers.

Vol. 17, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Melina: Too Beautiful To Be Taken Seriously?" **90-Minute Interview:** Magnum T.A. **Also Inside:** Introducing/Looking Back. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "The Smackdown Curse—This Is The Title You Don't Want To Win." **Also Inside:** James Storm, Hardys vs. Cade & Murdoch, Memphis Revival, John Cena, baldies.

Vol. 18, 2007: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Legend Killer! The Hidden Truth Behind Randy Orton's Obsession." **90-Minute Interview:** Bruno Sammartino. **Also Inside:** Bryan Danielson, Bob Backlund. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "The Benoit Tragedy: The Wrestling World Reacts And Remembers." **Also Inside:** Candice Michelle, Mark Henry.



Vol. 19, 2008: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Batista's Bombshell! If I Don't Beat The Undertaker, My Title Is Worthless!" **90-Minute Interview:** Ted DiBiase. **Also Inside:** C.M. Punk, Cena vs. Jeff Hardy, Bryan Danielson. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Jealousy Rages: Who Will Knock Out Karen Angle?" **Also Inside:** Rey Mysterio Jr., Turnbuckle Turkeys.

Vol. 20, 2008: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Kennedy Hornswoggled! How The Son-Of-A-Vince Story Should Have Played Out." **90-Minute Interview:** Tammy Sytch. **Also Inside:** Finlay, Super 8. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "Booker T(NA): I'm Pumped Up For The Second Half Of My Career!" **Also Inside:** Fabulous Moolah, Robert Roode, "Death Grip."

Vol. 21, 2008: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Kurt Angle: The Best Wrestler On The Planet!" **90-Minute Interview:** Nick Backwinkel. **Also Inside:** John Cena, The Briscoes. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "WrestleMania 24: The Thrilling Highs And Ridiculous Lows." **Also Inside:** Motor City Machine Guns, ECW, Kaz.

Vol. 22, 2008: Cover Story—*The Wrestler*: "Samoa Joe To TNA: Get Serious Or Get Hurt!" **90-Minute Interview:** Jim Cornette. **Also Inside:** Ric Flair, CHIKARA. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling*:** "WrestleMania 24: The Real Winners & Losers." **Also Inside:** Nigel McGuinness, Gail Kim.

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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended July 28, 2008

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAIYO KEA & MINORU SUZUKI

(June 28, 2008; from Joe Doering & Keiji Muto; Osaka, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RYUJI HIJIKATA

(April 29, 2008; from Silver King; Aichi, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: SUWAMA

(April 29, 2008; from Kensuke Sasaki; Nagoya, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: LARRY ZBYSZKO

(February 5, 2008; awarded the title by AWA Superstars of Wrestling; Minneapolis, MN)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: FREDERICK OF HOLLYWOOD

(July 26, 2008; from Glen Osbourne; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: CHASE DEL MONTE

(July 26, 2008; defeated Ace Darling, Robere Shields, and Aden Chambers in a four-way match; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

BRYAN & MATT LOGAN

(December 1, 2007; from Max Von Bauer & Kermion the German; Newark, DE)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MARK HENRY

(June 29, 2008; defeated Kane and The Big Show in a triple-threat match; Dallas, TX)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JAKE HAGER

(March 22, 2008; defeated Southern heavyweight champion Heath Miller to unify and disband the Southern heavyweight title; New Port Richey, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: EDDIE COLON & ERIC PEREZ

(July 17, 2008; from Drew McIntyre & Stu Sanders; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ERICK STEVENS

(July 19, 2008; from Roderick Strong; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JASON BLADE & KENNY KING

(November 9, 2007; from Jay & Mark Briscoe; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: SAL RINAURO

(November 9, 2007; from Erick Stevens; Crystal River, FL)

IWA MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: DINGO

(June 20, 2008; from Chuck Taylor; Sellersburg, IN)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEVIN KNIGHT

(May 8, 2008; from Travis Blake; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KEIJI MUTO

(April 27, 2008; from Shinsuke Nakamura; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS:

TOGI MAKABE & TORU YANO

(February 17, 2008; from Giant Bernard & Travis Tomko; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TIGER MASK IV

(July 8, 2007; defeated Prince Devitt in a tournament final for vacant title; Tokyo, Japan)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ANTHONY BRAVADO

(June 25, 2008; from Nick Dinsmore; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROB CONWAY & PAT BUCK

(May 28, 2008; from Ali & Omar Akbar; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: J.D. MICHAELS

(June 4, 2008; from Tommy McNaler; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: SERENA

(July 24, 2008; from The Baroness; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CHRIS HERO

(July 6, 2008; from Human Tornado; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TYLER BLACK & JIMMY JACOBS

(July 6, 2008; from Roderick Strong & El Generico; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: TAKESHI MORISHIMA

(March 2, 2008; from Mitsuharu Misawa; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: YOSHINOBU KANEMARU

(October 27, 2007; from Mushiking Terry; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: AKITOSHI SAITO & BISON SMITH

(May 23; from Naomichi Marafuji & Takeshi Sugiura; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: NIGEL McGUINNESS

(October 6, 2007; from Takeshi Morishima; Edison, NJ)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JIMMY JACOBS & TYLER BLACK

(June 6, 2008; defeated Kevin Steen & El Generico in the finals of a one-night tournament to win the vacant title; Hartford, CT)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MsCHIF

(April 26, 2008; from Sara Del Rey; Berwyn, IL)

TNA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TAYLOR WILDE

(June 24, 2008; from Awesome Kong; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: SAMOA JOE

(April 13, 2008; from Kurt Angle; Lowell, MA)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ

(May 11, 2008; defeated Team 3D in final round of "Deuces Wild" tag team tournament, Orlando, FL)

TNA X CHAMPION: PETEY WILLIAMS

(April 15, 2008; from Jay Lethal; Orlando, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: KOFI KINGSTON

(June 29, 2008; from Chris Jericho; Dallas, TX)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: C.M. PUNK

(June 30, 2008; from Edge; Oklahoma City, OK)

WWE WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TED DIBIASE JR. & CODY RHODES

(June 29, 2008; Rhodes turned against former partner Bob Holly and pinned him, securing the title for himself and new partner, DiBiase Jr.; Dallas, TX)

WWE HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TRIPLE-H

(April 27, 2008; from Randy Orton in a "Fatal Four-Way" match that also included John Cena and John Bradshaw Layfield; Baltimore, MD)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CURT HAWKINS & ZACK RYDER

(July 20, 2008; defeated the teams of champions Miz & John Morrison, Finlay & Hornswoggle, and Jesse & Festus in a four-way tag match when Hawkins pinned Jesse; Uniondale, NY)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: SHELTON BENJAMIN

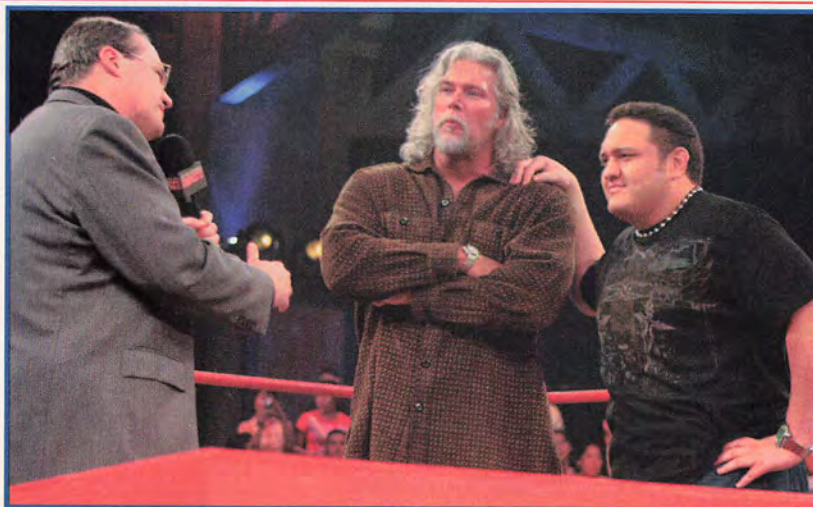
(July 20, 2008; from Matt Hardy; Uniondale, NY)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES

(April 14, 2008; from Beth Phoenix; London, England)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: MICHELLE McCOOL

(July 20, 2008; defeated Natalya to become first Divas champion; Uniondale, NY)



AUGUST 13, 2006:

On the sidelines, Nash watches protégé Alex Shelley be defeated by Chris Sabin in a number-one contender's match for the X division title.

MAY 13, 2007:

Nash takes on the role of advisor and, at times, marriage counselor to the Angles during weekly vignettes on Impact.



JANUARY 6, 2008:

Nash begins associating himself with Samoa Joe in a relationship that could only be described as tenuous at best. The duo loses to A.J. Styles and Tomko at Final Resolution.

OCTOBER 22, 2006:

In more of a mentor role, Nash returns from injury to announce the "Kevin Nash Invitational" X division tournament, which Austin Starr wins at Bound for Glory.

OCTOBER 14, 2007:

Working with Kurt Angle, Nash interferes on his behalf during the then-champion's match against Sting at Bound For Glory. Angle ends up losing the TNA World title.

MAY 22, 2008:

TNA World champion Samoa Joe neglects to name his associate Nash to the "King Of The Mountain" qualifying tournament, angering Nash.



wrestling timeline



JULY 8, 2002:

After returning from a torn biceps, Nash tears his quadriceps during a match on Raw and is sidelined for nearly a year.

NOVEMBER 7, 2004:

Nash and Scott Hall interfere on behalf of Jeff Jarrett allowing him to defeat Jeff Hardy at TNA's Victory Road pay-per-view.

MARCH 13, 2005:

Billy Gunn—known as The Outlaw in TNA—defeats Nash in a “First Blood” match that was taped for Destination X.

FEBRUARY 17, 2002:

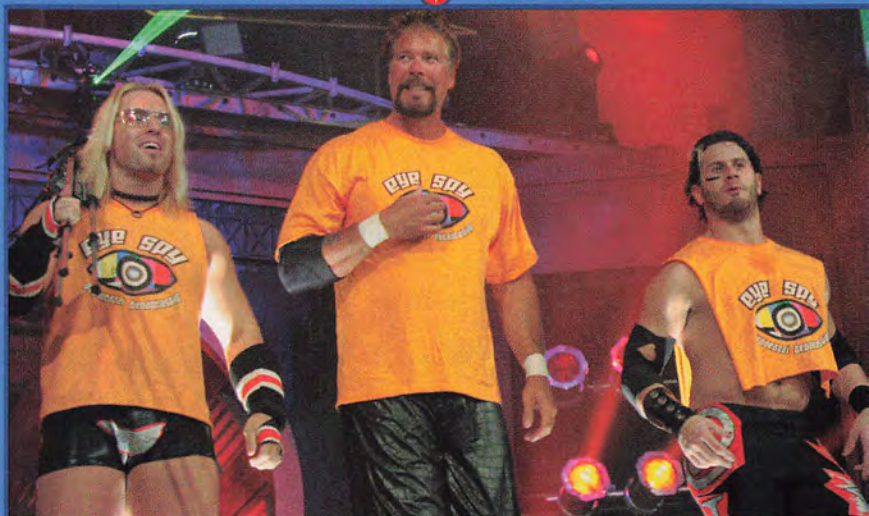
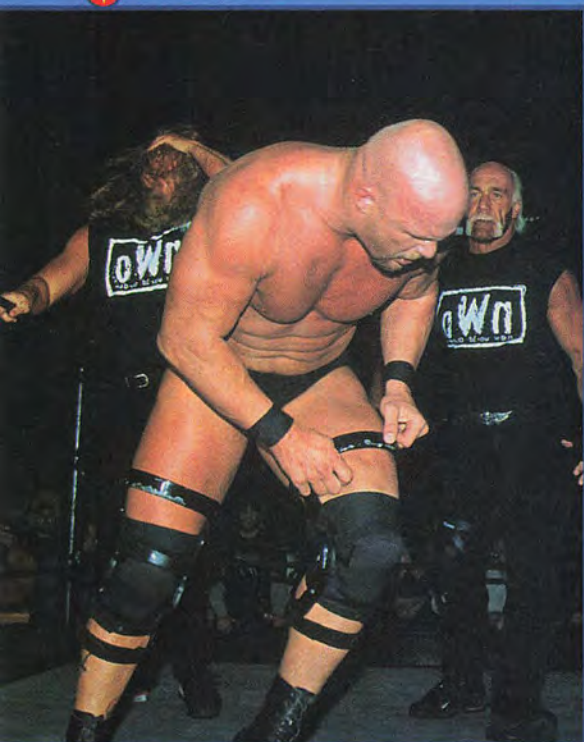
Bringing the NWO to WWE, Nash returns to assist Chris Jericho in defeating “Stone-Cold” Steve Austin at No Way Out.

AUGUST 24, 2003:

After returning in April, ahead of schedule, yet another injury shortens Nash's second stint in WWE. He loses to Triple-H in an “Elimination Chamber” match at SummerSlam 2003.

MAY 4, 2006:

Appearing in taped vignettes with Alex Shelley, Nash begins taking verbal shots at the TNA X division. At Victory Road, Nash and Shelley lose to Jay Lethal and Chris Sabin in an X division tag team match.





JANUARY 4, 1999:

Hollywood Hogan defeats Nash with the infamous "finger poke of doom" to win the WCW World title on *Nitro*.



DECEMBER 16, 1999:

The Outsiders defeat Bret Hart and Bill Goldberg in a "House Of Pain" match to win the WCW World tag team title on *Thunder*.

FEBRUARY 18, 2001:

Nash's final match with WCW is a loss to then-WCW World champion Scott Steiner at SuperBrawl.

MAY 9, 1999:

Nash recaptures the WCW World championship by defeating former Vegas Connection partner Diamond Dallas Page at Slamboree.



MAY 29, 2000:

Because he believes he deserves it more, Nash hands over the WCW World championship to Ric Flair on *Nitro*.

SEPTEMBER 4, 2000:

To help promote the film *Ready to Rumble*, Nash wins a "Tower Of Doom" match that is featured in the movie.



wrestling timeline

APRIL 19, 1998:

Nash and Hollywood Hogan defeat Roddy Piper and The Giant in a "Bat Match" at Spring Stampede 1998.

JUNE 14, 1998:

Leading the Wolfpac faction of the NWO, Nash becomes a WCW World tag team champion again as Sting chooses him to be his partner after single-handedly winning the gold.



DECEMBER 27, 1998:

With interference from Scott Hall, Nash defeats Bill Goldberg to capture his first WCW World championship at Starrcade.

JANUARY 16, 1998:

Now teaming with other members of the NWO, Nash and Randy Savage are defeated by Lex Luger and Diamond Dallas Page on an episode of *Thunder*.

OCTOBER 4, 1998:

On an episode of *Nitro*, Nash faces Scott Hall in a match that ends in a no-contest.

NOVEMBER 22, 1998:

"Big Sexy" becomes the number-one contender to the WCW World championship by winning a 60-man battle royal at World War 3.





MARCH 31, 1996:

Diesel becomes one of the unlucky people to encounter The Undertaker at WrestleMania, falling to the "Dead Man" at the 12th installment of the event.

JUNE 10, 1996:

Nash returns to WCW under his given name. He and Scott Hall begin invading WCW television programming.



OCTOBER 27, 1996:

The Outsiders beat Harlem Heat to win the WCW World tag team title at Halloween Havoc 1996.

MAY 19, 1996:

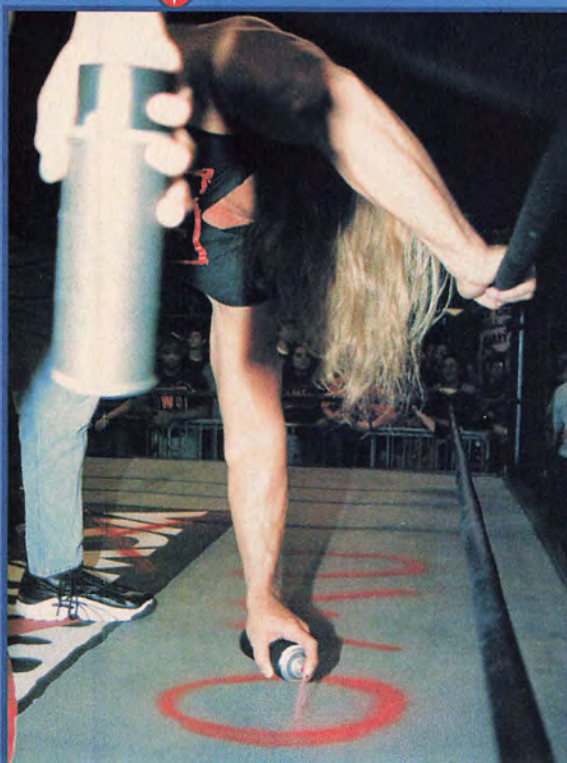
In his farewell match from WWF, Diesel along with Razor Ramon embrace Shawn Michaels and Triple-H following a house show match at Madison Square Garden.

JULY 7, 1996:

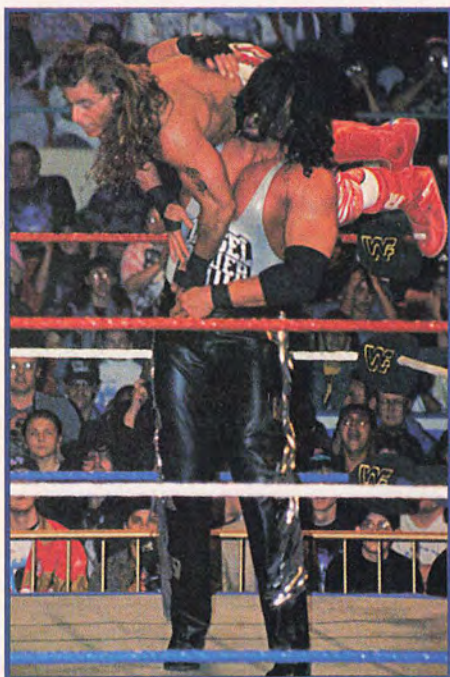
Nash and Hall—as The Outsiders—defeat Lex Luger, Randy Savage, and Sting at Bash At The Beach. Hulk Hogan is revealed as the partner of The Outsiders and the New World Order is formed.

JUNE 15, 1997:

At The Great American Bash, The Outsiders retain the WCW World tag team straps in a match against WCW representatives Ric Flair and Roddy Piper.



wrestling timeline



APRIL 2, 1995:

Headlining WrestleMania XI, Diesel retains the WWF World championship in his match with former friend Michaels.



NOVEMBER 19, 1995:

Bret Hart defeats Diesel to win the WWF World championship at Survivor Series 1995.

NOVEMBER 26, 1994:

Diesel pulls off the unthinkable by winning the WWF World championship from Bob Backlund in only eight seconds, thus becoming a triple-crown champion in the calendar year of 1994.

SEPTEMBER 24, 1995:

The second time is a charm for Diesel and Michaels as they reunite to recapture the WWF World tag title, this time from Yokozuna and the British Bulldog.

FEBRUARY 18, 1996:

In a rematch for the WWF World title, Diesel again falls to Hart at In Your House 6 in a steel cage match.



Kevin Nash



INSIDE WRESTLING journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport

JUNE 6, 1993:

Making the leap from WCW to the WWF, Nash debuts as Diesel at a house show. He is the personal bodyguard for Shawn Michaels.

NOVEMBER 24, 1993:

Diesel's team of Rick Martel, Adam Bomb, and Irwin R. Schyster loses to Razor Ramon's team of Marty Jannetty, Randy Savage, and the 1-2-3 Kid at Survivor Series.

AUGUST 28, 1994:

Riding quite the hot streak, Diesel and Michaels capture the WWF World tag team title by defeating The Headshrinkers. For one day, Diesel holds half of the tag team title and the Intercontinental strap.

AUGUST 30, 1993:

Diesel's interference at SummerSlam 1993 allows Intercontinental champion Shawn Michaels to retain the gold in his match with Mr. Perfect.

APRIL 13, 1994:

Diesel captures the first singles championship of his career defeating Razor Ramon for the Intercontinental title.

AUGUST 29, 1994:

Writing another chapter in their early history together, Razor Ramon recaptures the Intercontinental title from Diesel at SummerSlam 1994.



wrestling timeline



SEPTEMBER 5, 1990:

Debuting under the name of "Steel," Nash sports an orange Mohawk haircut as part of the tag team Master Blasters. The duo wins its first match in World Championship Wrestling.



MAY 19, 1991:

Out on his own, Nash—now known as Oz—beats Tim Parker in a then-record 26 seconds at SuperBrawl.

OCTOBER 25, 1992:

Nash is paired with up-and-comer Diamond Dallas Page to form the Vegas Connection. The duo falls to Erik Watts and Van Hammer at Halloween Havoc 1992.

JULY 9, 1959:

Kevin Scott Nash is born in Detroit, Michigan.

OCTOBER 27, 1990:

Steel and Blade defeat Tracy Smothers and Steve Armstrong at Halloween Havoc 1990.

JANUARY 21, 1992:

Another year, another gimmick. Nash—going by the name Vinnie Vegas—defeats Thomas Rich at Clash of the Champions 18.



influx of overseas talent?

MURPHY: That may be true, but it's rare, if ever, that something like that happens in wrestling. There have been many great wrestlers who are adored in their home countries that have come to compete in the U.S. that just do not get over with the fans. I'm not sure that the off chance of ROH or TNA grabbing the next Keiji Muto or Mistico and having them hit it off with the American fan justifies the risk.

HICKS: But, not shining a spotlight on international wrestling would seem like TNA and ROH were not living up to the standards they have created for themselves.

SAKS: How so, Brady?

HICKS: Well, TNA holds the "World X Cup," which brings in teams representing the various styles and cultures of wrestling throughout the world. ROH's code of honor is admittedly derived from the Japanese style of wrestling. The appeal, in my opinion, of both promotions is that they toe the line between what seems to be the preferred Americanized version of professional wrestling and the sport that purists long for.

SAKS: That's an interesting perspective, Brady. So, let's sum up: Dan, I get the impression that you do not think there's much of an upside to TNA and ROH's recent emphasis on international wrestling.

MURPHY: Of course there's some merit to it, but just not at this point in their development. Both organizations are still developing their fan bases here, regardless of how long they've been around. It just feels like they're both spreading themselves too thin. Like it or not, the American style of the sport, as it exists, is what sells right now. Veering too far from that is a risky proposition and one I'm not sure is the best plan.

MELTZER: I see Dan's point, however I feel as if both TNA and



Photo by George Tahiros

For the 2008 World X Cup, TNA recruited talent from around the globe. The eventual winners of the trophy were Mexican stars Rey Bucanero, Ultimo Guerrero, Volador Jr., and Averno, billed as Team Mexico.

ROH are following an interesting and creative path toward establishing their brands as global entities. Of course, a wrong move here or there could prove to be far more detrimental to them than, say, WWE, but the risk seems worthwhile. The international style of wrestling has a great amount of appeal, and, if done and marketed the right way, it could start to become a new standard for the American product.

HICKS: I'd say I'm cautiously leaning toward the notion that there is an upside to this strategy. Maybe I have too much faith in both, but TNA and ROH have

seemed to be solid in their approaches to emphasizing international wrestling. Plus, both are very well received by the audiences abroad. TNA's tour of the United Kingdom earlier this year was a rousing success. I suppose I admire both organizations' willingness to stretch the limits.

SAKS: Everyone made some good points, thank you. Both TNA and Ring of Honor seem intent on showcasing international wrestling, which must mean that, internally, the response is positive. Whether this will positively affect their domestic success is something that remains to be seen. □

SAKS: That's an interesting point, Brady. One of the big selling points that guys like Kurt Angle and Booker T cited after joining TNA was that the less intensive schedule was good for both their physical and psychological well being. It seems as if both ROH and TNA could run into a no-win situation if they push their top talent—who were sold on a premise of a soft schedule—to make the trip or, even worse, allow them to go only when convenient.

MURPHY: Exactly, and those are the guys fans want to see. European wrestling fans are very discerning and, although they tend to prefer the technical aspects of the sport more to the talking points, they're like anyone else in that they want to see the stars. These promotions would be doing a disservice to both themselves and the fans if they didn't put on pay-per-view quality cards overseas. But, that's what makes a guy like Tomko so valuable. His international experience and appeal is great for TNA.

HICKS: Bill has a point and, for the record, I don't think that the emphasis on international wrestling or the overseas tours are a terrible idea. It's just that, going back to Stu's earlier premise, these efforts could easily be redirected toward developing their fan bases through the entertainment aspect of wrestling before overemphasizing something that, quite frankly, doesn't have as much widespread appeal.

SAKS: True, but isn't a point of pride with both organizations that they tend to do things against what's expected? An emphasis on international wrestling, combined with what the U.S. fan prefers seems to give both ROH and TNA an inside track on two distinct markets.

HICKS: Absolutely, but there's the old adage of "going against the grain," and then there's a matter of sound business principles.

MURPHY: I agree with Brady. It's one thing to sell yourself as

the alternative to WWE, but ROH and TNA need to realize that it's not economically viable for them to put *too* much of an emphasis on international wrestling. It's not as if I'm advocating that international wrestling or overseas tours aren't a good thing, but it seems like ROH and TNA may be getting ahead of themselves by emphasizing them.

SAKS: Fair enough, Dan. But, aside from the financial interests of the promotions, are there any other consequences—both positive and negative—of placing an emphasis on international wrestling? Bill, what are your thoughts?

MELTZER: Stu, as with any other sport, I would have to say that the biggest, non-financial benefit to promotions like TNA and

"Maybe I have too much faith in both, but TNA and ROH have seemed to be solid in their approaches to emphasizing international wrestling. Plus, both are very well received by the audiences abroad."

—Brady Hicks

ROH putting an emphasis on international wrestling and looking into foreign markets is that there is an overwhelming amount of untapped talent just waiting to be discovered. For years, other professional sports had unwritten codes about foreign talent competing in their leagues. But, where would both sports be right now without the



Ring of Honor's biggest (literally and figuratively) Japanese star is an anomaly in terms of international success in the U.S. It isn't often that the star power of talent from other countries translates into American success, but it has been done. Takeshi Morishima is a prime example.



Despite this guitar shot at the Tokyo Dome, conditions are amicable between Jeff Jarrett and his Japanese contacts as they strengthen their business relationship. But will the return on investment of travel expenses be enough for the talent to continue to support such agreements?

acclaim by providing the type of cards that TNA is moving toward. The ROH fan is devoutly loyal and very well versed in the nuances of international wrestling.

By taking their product overseas and infusing it with international wrestling flair, TNA and ROH could be seen as mortgaging their domestic success against the widespread appeal of the global market. This strategy could prove to be either the launching point or undoing of both organizations in the long run. Publisher Stu Saks sat down with Senior Writer Dan Murphy and Contributing Writers Bill Meltzer and Brady Hicks to discuss the impact of both organizations' emphasis on international wrestling.

STU SAKS: Good afternoon, gentlemen. Today we're going to discuss a topic that is both intriguing and a bit confusing. Both Ring of Honor and more recently TNA have put an emphasis on international wrestling, with each promotion garnering its fair share of critical acclaim and, in some cases,

criticism, for doing so. What I'd like to examine is whether we see this strategy as having much of an upside or, conversely, if the efforts of both ROH and TNA should be focused on increasing visibility in the States.

BILL MELTZER: Stu, I think this is a great move for both TNA and ROH. Both promotions are filling a niche market in the U.S.—notably, catering to fans that put a higher premium on wrestling than on the scripted segments. By infusing international wrestling into their current product, both are able to appease the discerning fan as well as grab greater attention and admiration abroad. Both have done this through increased domestic visibility and by actually going overseas for events that, I feel, will be beneficial in the long run.

DAN MURPHY: Well, that's assuming that both promotions are able to keep up the travel schedule and carry the huge financial burden that comes with overseas tours.

SAKS: Dan, would you please elaborate a bit. The financial burden

is obvious, but with this being the livelihood for the wrestlers associated with both promotions, shouldn't the travel be their top priority?

MURPHY: Yes and no, Stu. Let's not forget that most of these trips are not "all expenses paid" by any promotion. And TNA and ROH are no exception. Some of the costs are passed down to the individual wrestlers who, quite frankly, aren't pulling down the massive salaries we hear about with WWE. It's great to see ROH and TNA bringing the international style to U.S. fans, but even if they see a financial advantage down the road, they must be mindful of the current bottom line.

BRADY HICKS: Plus, one of the perks of working for a TNA or ROH was *supposed* to be the greater flexibility in schedule. Travel abroad doesn't exactly allow for much downtime, even though it's meant to better the product. It seems as if both promotions could benefit more by allowing their wrestlers to compete overseas—as they do now—and bring back some of that international flair.

editors' roundtable

TNA and ROH are putting even more emphasis on international wrestling; what is the upshot?

"By infusing international wrestling into their current product, both are able to appease the discerning fan as well as grab greater attention and admiration abroad. Both have done this through increased domestic visibility and by actually going overseas for events that, I feel, will be beneficial in the long run."

—Bill Meltzer

ABOVE ALL ELSE professional wrestling is a for-profit business in a cutthroat industry filled with huge personalities and even bigger stakes. What was once a niche sport that catered to a discerning fan has now become a worldwide multimillion-dollar industry. With WWE as the recognized industry leader, setting the tone for the direction of sports entertainment in the United States and making strong international inroads at the same time, rival promotions TNA and Ring of Honor have begun to invest heavily in bringing international talent to the U.S. and establishing fan bases abroad.

While the payoff for such investments can be tremendous over time, there is inherent short-term risk as well.

Through events such as its widely renowned "World X Cup" tournament, TNA has gradually begun to show that it can hold an appeal among fans who appreciate the sport of wrestling and others who seek the entertainment elements. Similarly, and perhaps in a more concentrated respect, Ring of Honor's foundation was built upon the traditions and appeals of international wrestling. With a distinct feel of the most highly touted Japanese promotions, ROH has gained wide



Motor City Machine Guns Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin stand hand-in-hand with Japanese visitors Naruki Doi and Masato Yashino. TNA—and Ring of Honor—are making distinct strides to broaden their horizons by extending their hands to international talent.

Mitchell. With Steiner, it's all about ego. I can handle Steiner any time he steps out of line, whether it's with me or someone else like Kaz. As for Williams, if he wants to continue to follow someone like Scott Steiner, it'll be his undoing.

Q: Your style in the ring really hasn't changed much since the split with Mitchell. Do you view it as a matter of sticking with what works?

A: Yeah, exactly. I only know one way in the ring, and that's full speed ahead. I've always wrestled a very aggressive style and tried to take advantage of my size and strength. It wouldn't make sense for me to try to wrestle like A.J. Styles or Jay Lethal or those types of wrestlers. I'm built for power and destruction and I love to brawl, so you're not going to see a lot of fancy takedowns or aerial moves from me.

Q: Who would you rate as your toughest opponent to date?

A: I don't want this to come out the wrong way, but I'd say that my

toughest opponent has been myself. I carried around a lot of mental and emotional baggage for a long, long time and it affected my focus in the ring.

Q: How about from a physical standpoint in the ring?

A: Sting is such a legend in wrestling that it was always a real challenge to wrestle him, because you're wrestling against a guy who's done it all and gone up against a who's who in this business. But, really, I've had a lot of great opponents. The brawls with Rhino were pretty intense. I felt like I learned something every time I stepped in the ring with A.J. Styles. It's hard to pick just one.

Q: When you're in the ring—since you've readily acknowledged that Abyss is still part of your personality—where does Chris Parks end and Abyss begin?

A: Like I was just saying, I'm built for power and destruction. The difference is that Abyss destroyed his opponents to avoid his own mental self-destruction. It was never



"I'd say that my toughest opponent has been myself. I carried around a lot of mental and emotional baggage for a long, long time and it affected my focus in the ring."

about winning matches for Abyss, even when the World championship belt was on the line. It was about releasing pent-up rage. Chris Parks destroys opponents with a wrestling goal in mind. I'm very proud to have worn the World championship belt. It's an honor most wrestlers never get to experience.

Q: I would assume your goal is to get back into the title picture. Do you have a timeline in mind?

A: First things first. James Mitchell might be gone from TNA for now, but there is other scum to eliminate. As long as Steiner and Williams are polluting TNA, it's my responsibility to drive them out for good. But when—not if—I accomplish that task, of course I'd like to win the TNA World championship again. I'll enjoy it more the next time around, too, because I'll have won it for all the right reasons. □



Abyss was trained to mow down his opponents, which is the technique he is still using in TNA (above). But whereas before Abyss' motivation was to vent his mounting rage, Chris Parks' motivation comes from the desire to regain the TNA World championship (right).





"I've never been a knockoff of other wrestlers. I have my own identity, my own style. Now that I'm free to express myself, people are recognizing that I'm not part-Kane, part-Mankind."

and betrayed something that should be a sacred bond—is always going to be inside of me. The difference now is that I'm not afraid of James Mitchell anymore, and I'm not ashamed of Chris Parks.

Q: I notice that you keep referring to Mitchell by his full name. Mind if I ask why?

A: He's a lousy excuse for a so-called father, so I'm not going to call him "Father." He's never been my friend, so I'm not going to call him James. And he's a disgrace to the Mitchell family name—which is why I go by Parks, my mother's maiden name—but he doesn't stand for the entire family. I can't even call him my former manager. A manager is supposed to look out for his wrestlers, not the other way around.

Q: What are your feelings about Judas Mesias, Mitchell's other son?

A: I feel bad for him. Like me, he lets James Mitchell control his every action. The difference

between us is that James Mitchell might have controlled my actions, but he never really controlled my mind. If I didn't have a mind of my own, things would have been much easier for me. Judas Mesias never thinks for himself, so he's the sort of son James Mitchell always wanted. Unfortunately for him, that's going to lead to his own destruction. Frankly, being destroyed at my hands will actually be less painful for him, at least emotionally. Physically, not so much.

Q: Switching gears for a moment here. Many people have compared your identity as Abyss to a cross between early-Kane and Mick Foley's Mankind. Do you think that's a fair comparison?

A: I understand why people make that comparison. Here's my response. First of all, think about James Mitchell—he didn't want Abyss to have any identity of his own. He shaped me into Abyss, with an appearance people would



Under the thumb of James Mitchell, Abyss was nothing but the "Monster" Mitchell blackmailed him to be. But when Abyss' secret came out, Mitchell did something he hadn't anticipated: He emancipated Chris Parks. At least Mitchell still has Judas Mesias to control.



Abyss identifies with Petey Williams, who is seeking guidance from another demented source: Scott Steiner. Abyss returned to TNA to rid it of men like Steiner and Mitchell.

immediately recognize. It was just another way of him trying to deny me my own identity. But I've never been a knockoff of other wrestlers. I have my own identity, my own style. Now that I'm free to express myself, people are recognizing that I'm not part-Kane, part-Mankind. Actually, I think some people saw that anyway, once they saw me in the ring. I have my own style. Now they're also seeing I'm 100 percent my own person and my own wrestler. That was James Mitchell's biggest fear. And guess what. That fear has come true.

Q: Apart from Mitchell and Mesias, we've seen you stand up to Scott Steiner and Petey Williams and give both of them the black hole slam. I'd be interested to know what you think about the way Steiner has essentially turned Williams into a clone of himself.

A: Williams is another misguided soul looking for direction. Steiner is scum. But at least he's predictable scum, unlike James



ABYSS

“Now James Mitchell has nothing to hold over me”

CHRIS “ABYSS” PARKS is aptly named. As recent events on TNA Impact and pay-per-views have shown, his storyline life has been a vortex of anguish and torment caused by Father James Mitchell.

On a host of occasions over the past few years, the 6'5" “Monster” seemed to be on the brink of breaking free from Mitchell’s Svengalli-like control. Each time, Mitchell reaffirmed his power, causing Abyss to lash out instead at his manager’s enemies.

Mitchell’s ace in the hole was a longstanding threat to reveal the dark secret that turned Chris Parks into a violent and mute beast. When their relationship once again reached the breaking point, Mitchell (with new charge Judas Mesias at his beck and call) made good on the threat. Mitchell revealed that he was Abyss’ father. It was also revealed that Parks had been driven over the edge by his father’s treatment of his mother.

Rather than driving Abyss out of wrestling as he’d intended, Mitchell’s declaration has had the effect of liberating the Monster from his control. While still extremely dangerous in the ring, Abyss has set a new course for himself. Sporting a new mask and finally speaking for himself, he’s re-assumed the name Chris Parks and protected the fan favorites of TNA against Mitchell, Mesias, and other rulebreakers. Mitchell has been nowhere to be found in TNA since before Parks’ return.

Abyss recently granted an interview to Contributing Writer Bill



“In trying to destroy me, he made he stronger. In a twisted way, he gave me a gift—the gift of regaining my life and independence.”

Meltzer. Laconic at first, Parks soon opened up and revealed why he felt he had no choice but to do Mitchell’s bidding—and why he now feels the revelation of his secret was the best thing that ever happened to his career.

Q: Would you rather be called Abyss or Chris during this interview? I’ll call you whichever you prefer.

A: Either one is okay, but my name is Chris.

Q: Chris is it. As you know, Chris, James Mitchell has had plenty to say about you in the time since he went public with your

secret. What’s your response?

A: James Mitchell has hell to pay. He thought he could destroy me. He thought wrong. If he ever shows his face in TNA again, he had better be ready for me.

Q: You’ve been a changed person since Mitchell went public with the story. How do you feel about the way things have worked out?

A: Regretful ... (long pause) ... and grateful.

Q: How so?

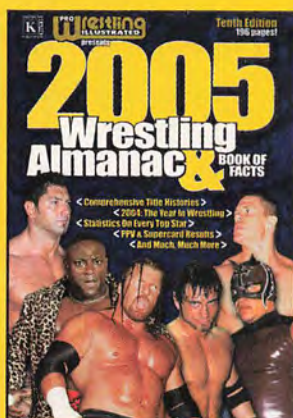
A: I regret that I didn’t take things in my own hands sooner. Now James Mitchell has nothing to hold over me.

Q: And that’s why you’re also grateful? He lost his ability to blackmail you?

A: Exactly. I owe James Mitchell a debt of gratitude. If he hadn’t come out and told everyone my secret, I’d still be under his control. In trying to destroy me, he made he stronger. In a twisted way, he gave me a gift—the gift of regaining my life and independence. Does that make sense?

Q: I think so. You’ve said on Impact that although you’ve gotten back in touch with Chris Parks, Abyss will always be inside of you. Could you elaborate?

A: The things that have happened to me are ... well, they’re not something I can ever totally get over. That anger at the way James Mitchell used and abused me—



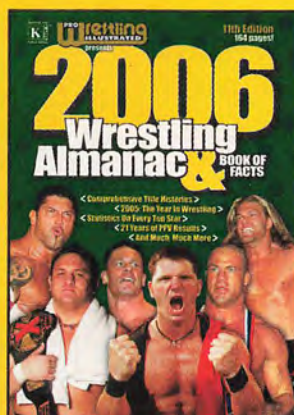
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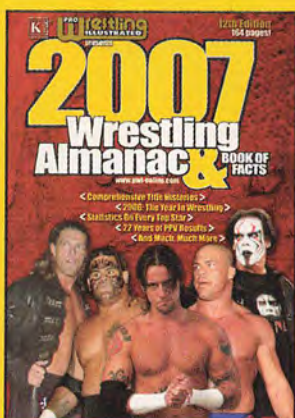
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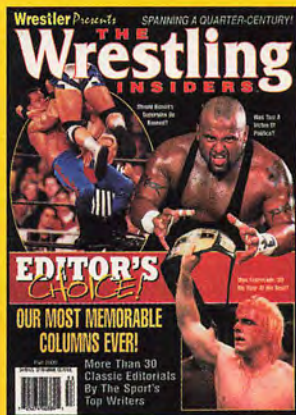
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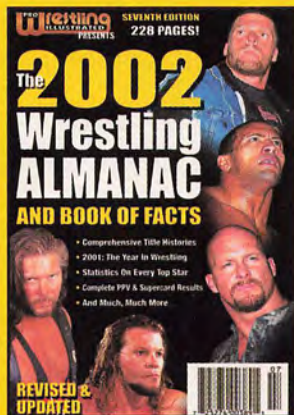
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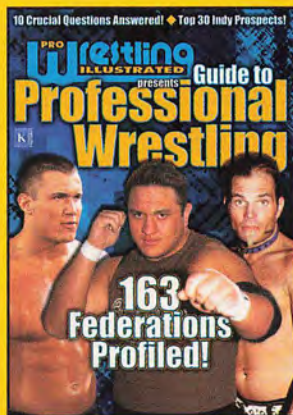
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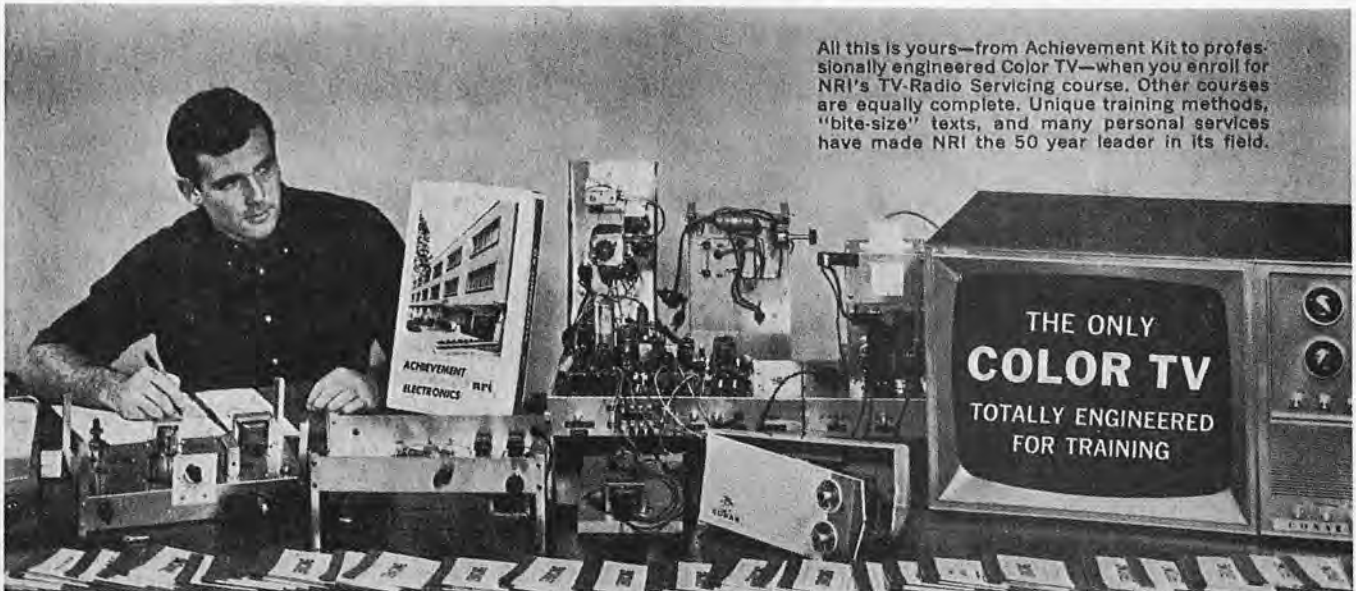
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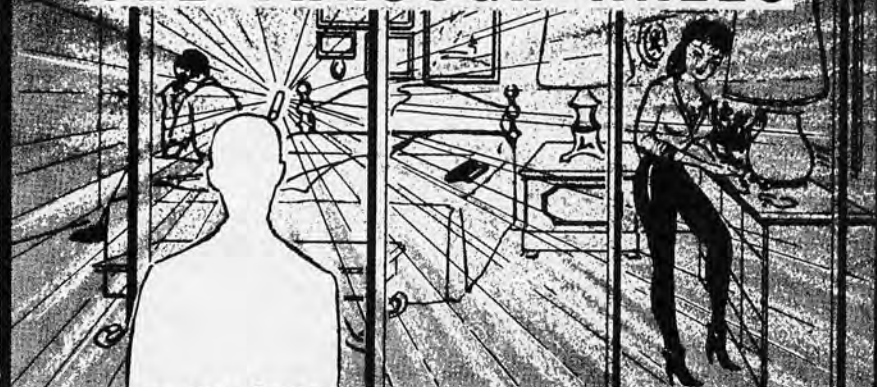
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AFTER WORK

(Continued from Page 45)

must stay over in a city, I eat a big meal after the match, go for a walk and then head right for bed. I have no time for socializing."

Wrestlers like Eddie Graham and Ray Stevens don't have to rush out of town after a match. The reason: they fly their own planes. Says Graham: "It's great this way because instead of my waiting for a plane, the plane waits for me."

There is one well-known



Off to the hunt with his dog, "Big Red," is Larry Hennig.

wrestler, who threatened to break our neck if we dared mention his name, who has a fascination for shooting dice and who can somehow manage to find a crap game in any strange town. This guy never sleeps. As soon as he gets paid for a match, he takes off to play dice.

It's a curious and unnatural life these wrestlers lead. And yet they seem to thrive on it. "I wouldn't trade what I do for a living for the presidency of General Motors," says Red Bastien. "I wouldn't trade because the president of General Motors doesn't have the freedom I have."

You're probably right, Red. But if it's all the same to you, we'd take that General Motors job. ☐

My host shook his head. "I might do that—and I might not. Tell you why. You see, I run into a lot of people. Without my mask, I mean. Oh, I take it off when I'm sure I'm safe. Anyway, sometimes when I go into my garage or something like that I hear a guy talking about wrestlers and he says, 'Boy, if I could ever get a-hold of that Clawman, I'd really twist his neck or hit him in the head with a hammer'—and there I am, standing right next to him. I look at the guy and I think to myself, 'Even if I gave this bum a hammer, he still couldn't beat me!'"

The logic of all this escaped



Ciclon Negro has had it but the Clawman continues digging despite referee Otto Kuss' efforts to yank him off.

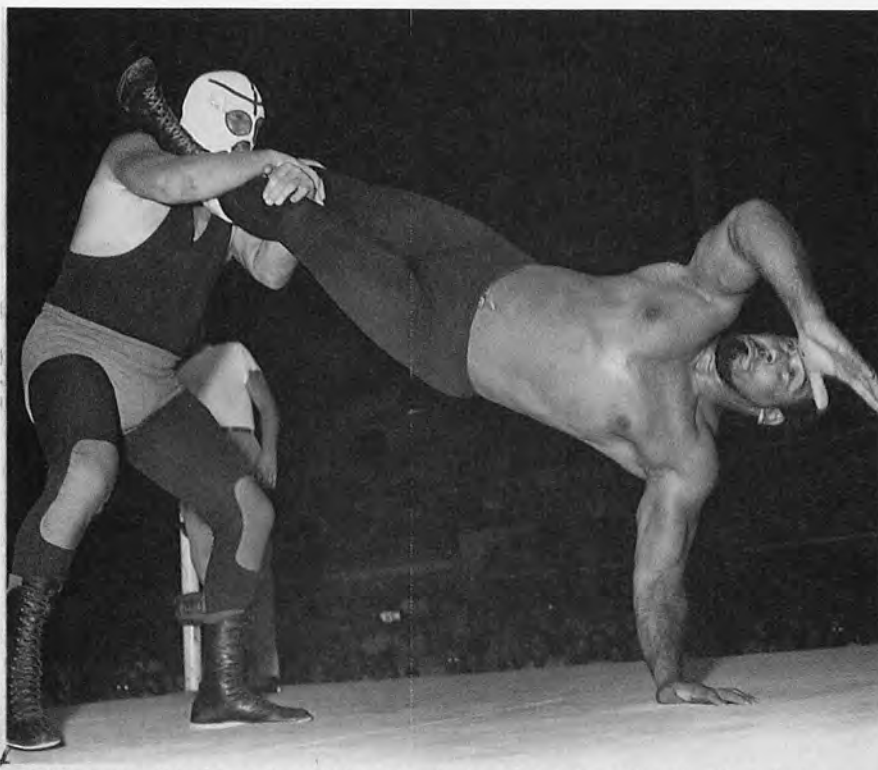
me but, then, I figured that The Clawman was just trying to confuse me. One thing he had said, though, stuck in my mind. And it must have showed because he asked, "What's the trouble?"

"Did you say you take off your mask occasionally?"

He nodded.

"Then . . ." But I didn't finish.

After all, how could I tell him that a former FBI agent had muffed his assignment? ■



The Clawman absorbs an incredible amount of punishment waiting for that single moment when he can apply his dreaded hold. "This is no game for sissies," he snorts.



The masked terror likes to break bones before applying his Kidney Claw. "I may have lost matches officially," he says, "but never in my heart or mind."

'Why do my wife and dog wear a mask, too? Say, you're a very nosy fellow...!'

"I don't think you should use that word, because I'm actually a very scientific wrestler. Now the Claw is legal, as everybody knows. And if any of those skinny, pencil-necked guys don't like it, they oughtta get out of the game."

"I've heard that you're a wild guy when you get steamed up. That you like to stir up people, start riots..."

"Well, I'm not proud of that fact but I'll tell you this: when the fans get mad at me, they're not half as mad at me as I am at them. Some of them are so ignorant... Now I'm an intelligent man. I have a college degree. But these people come around and ask me some of the most stupid questions. It's ridiculous."

The Clawman swung a beefy leg over the arm of his chair and grunted: "I'll wrestle anybody anywhere, anytime—and beat him. Don't misunderstand me. I've 'lost' matches—officially, anyway. But in my heart and mind, I've never been beaten."

"Some skinny, pencil-necked guy comes along and thinks he can lick me. Now that's ridiculous. I



Here's an unusual family portrait. It took some doing to get but our photographer finally persuaded the Clawman to pose with wife, Anne, and their dog, "Duchess."

know he can't. He takes a couple of beers and maybe drinks some wine and right away he brags, 'I can whip The Clawman.'

"That's like me going out and trying to take a fellow's appendix out. I don't know anything about operations. I can pull it out of his stomach with my hands—but I won't guarantee that he'll live. A surgeon can cut it out, though, because he knows what he's doing. Well, now, in wrestling, I know what I'm doing."

"I've been in over 4,000 matches. That's a lot of know-how. I've wrestled all over the world—India, Africa, Japan—and learned different techniques. But I never stop learning. I even picked up some tips in Switzerland. They have a funny style of wrestling there—they use the hips a lot. All that stuff comes in mighty handy."

"I'll bet it does," I said. "I've seen some of the results. One guy quit right on the spot after you gave him the hip treatment."

The Clawman snorted. "You've got to be able to stand a lot of pain in this business. Some fellows, they go out there and try to take the easy way. I'm not that way. Once I get into a ring, I'm out to win any way I know how."

This is no game for sissies."

"You sure proved that the other night when you wrestled despite the fact that you'd burned your chest that same afternoon."

The Clawman looked up suspiciously. "How did you find out about that?" he shot out.

"Oh, I heard it somewhere..."

He regarded me thoughtfully for a moment. Then he said: "Are you sure you're not an FBI man?"

"Whatever gave you that idea?"

"Well, you're an awfully snoop fellow. I didn't mention the accident to anybody—not even the promoter. I was checking the overheated engine in my car when the radiator hose connection broke and sprayed my chest with scalding water. Second-degree burns. It was agonizing, but I worked that night—and haven't missed a match since."

Now that I had him in a good frame of mind, I tried to worm out his secret. But he turned me down flat.

"Okay," I said, resignedly. "But will you do one thing for me? If we ever meet again after you retire, will you come up and tell me who you are? I'll be happy to know that I finally met The Clawman without his mask."



Anne prepares for the worst as her husband demonstrates Kidney Claw he perfected after years of experimentation.

For six solid weeks, I shadowed this hulking bruiser. He's 6'2", 240 pounds—and easy to spot. Me, I'm a skinny runt who can hide behind a pencil. But wherever The Clawman went, he always kept his mask on.

I talked to his friends. To his neighbors. To the baker, the butcher and everybody else he had any dealings with. "Yes, we know The Clawman," they'd say. "No, we don't know who he is," they'd add. "He's very secretive."

Finally, I said the hell with it. I decided to march right up to his apartment and ask him point-blank. All he could do was throw me out. And—who knows?—maybe his wife would answer the door and I'd pretend to be a brush salesman whose company was mailing out free samples and wouldn't she please fill out this card with her name on it?

Unfortunately, The Clawman's wife didn't answer the bell. *He* did, almost filling the entire doorway with his bulk. I played it straight and told him the purpose of my visit. To my surprise, he invited me in.

It was the first of several surprises. The next one came when his wife strode into the living room. I did a double-take. *She was wearing a mask too.*

"Have a seat," The Clawman said. As I sat down, I heard a dog barking in the adjoining room. A moment later, the pooch came bounding in. You'll never believe it, but even the dog was masked. This was too much!

The Clawman looked at me with amusement. "What's the matter?" he asked, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a man's wife and dog to wear a mask.

"Matter?" I exploded. "Are you kidding? What's the idea of all this secrecy?"

"Well," he said, "you know why I wear a mask, so we don't have to go into . . ."

"No, I don't," I confessed.

"Well, never mind," he said brusquely. "Well get into that later. But my wife—she wears a mask because she's a very famous person, a national figure. Same way with our dog. She's a pedigree—won a lot of ribbons all over the country."

Who is this terror? Our private sleuth, a former FBI man, tried to find out. In the process, he learned something J. Edgar Hoover had never taught him.



The Clawman, who can't stand inquisitive fans, snarls, "Get outta my way!" as he heads back to his dressing room.

"So . . . ?"

"So if my wife and dog removed their masks, people would immediately identify them with me and my secret would be out."

"Say," I remembered, "didn't the Associated Press send out a picture of your dog a few years back?"

The Clawman looked surprised. "Yes," he admitted grudgingly, "but I'm not going to tell you when or where—or you'll go off like a bird-dog to look it up and

then you'll know who I am."

"Okay, but tell me one thing—why do you wear the mask at all?"

"Because a lot of wrestlers are cowards."

"How's that again?"

"Look," he said, "when I wrestled without one, I beat up my opponents so bad they didn't want any part of me any more . . ."

"So you donned the mask because you were losing work . . . your opponents canceled out the minute they heard your name?"

"Right."

"I can understand that, all right—but why all the secrecy?"

The Clawman made an impatient gesture.

"Well, I've just perfected my Claw. I spent a lot of time developing it and I'm very proud of it. But I can't stand all those fans wanting to know everything about it and moaning over how much I hurt my opponents with it."

"What's the difference between your Claw hold and the one used by Fritz von Erich or Duke Keomuka? Theirs is bad enough. But I've noticed that when you use it, you practically leave a guy for dead. There must be something special about it. How did you develop it . . . how do you apply it?"

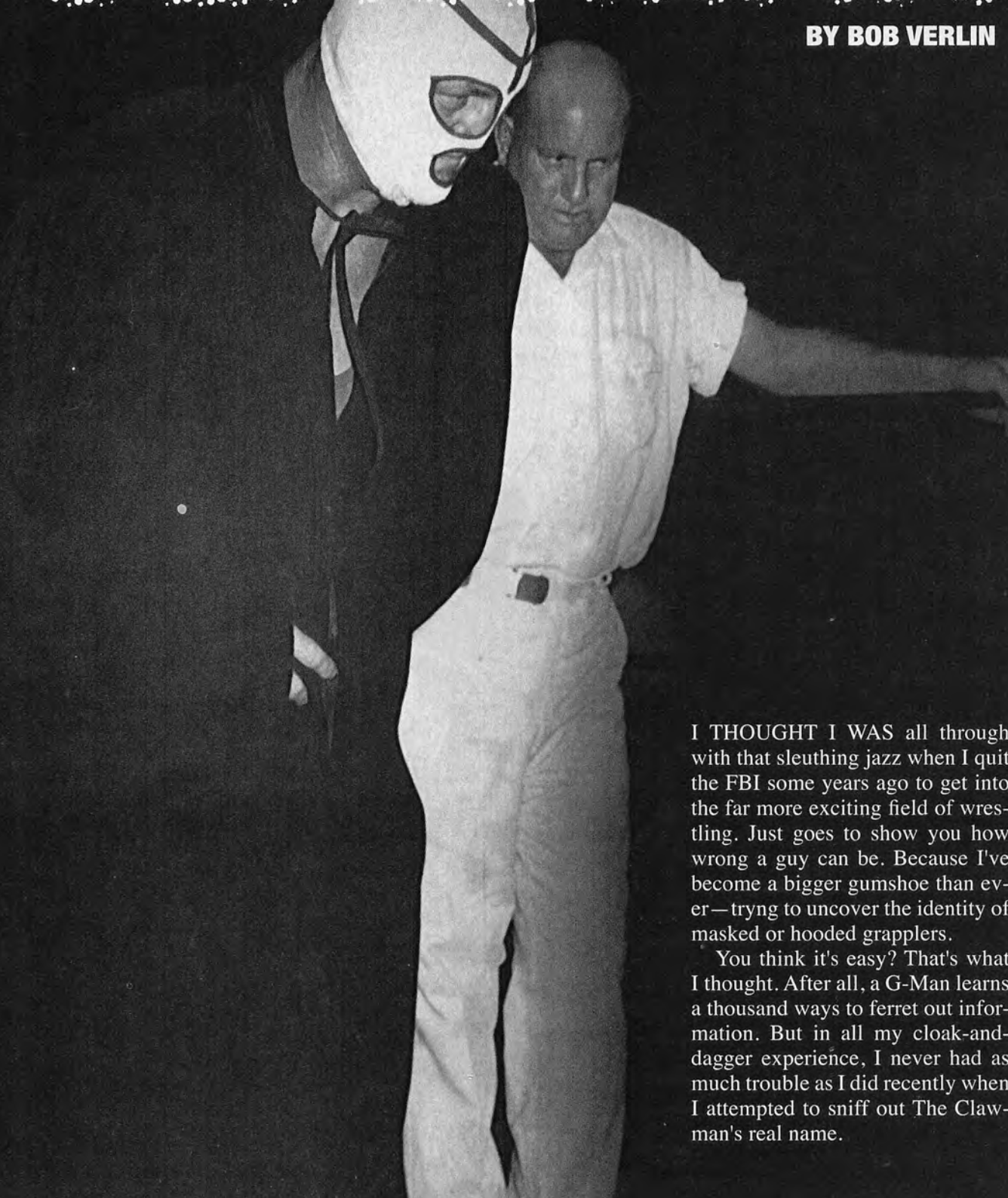
The Clawman gave me a hard look. "You're getting awfully personal," he growled. "You should be in the FBI the way you're throwing these questions around. (If he only knew!) I'll tell you this much: it's a Kidney Claw and I think it's the most vicious hold of all. I spent years learning it. I went to Japan and studied their claw holds—they've got some of the best. I improved on theirs and I know that my hold exceeds anything I've ever seen or heard of."

"I've never wrestled Fritz von Erich but I've seen him use his Claw. It's very effective on the average fellow, but not quite as devastating as mine. The Duke is just another wrestler with a Claw hold. I don't think his is very good. Anybody with strong stomach muscles can resist it. But *no-body* has ever broken out of mine."

"You're a pretty 'dirty' wrestler, aren't you?" *Continued*

3 SECRET LIVES OF THE CLAWMAN

BY BOB VERLIN



I THOUGHT I WAS all through with that sleuthing jazz when I quit the FBI some years ago to get into the far more exciting field of wrestling. Just goes to show you how wrong a guy can be. Because I've become a bigger gumshoe than ever—trying to uncover the identity of masked or hooded grapplers.

You think it's easy? That's what I thought. After all, a G-Man learns a thousand ways to ferret out information. But in all my cloak-and-dagger experience, I never had as much trouble as I did recently when I attempted to sniff out The Clawman's real name.



have a ball in Montreal no matter what time of day or night."

But not all wrestlers are looking to have a ball. Some enjoy returning to their hotel room immediately after work. They have a drink and watch television until they fall asleep.

When a wrestler is scheduled to work the following night in a town a few hundred miles away, he will often prefer to leave immediately for his destination, sometimes driving all night, and sleep the next day. Pat O'Connor always does that. So does Bob Ellis.

Since wrestlers are much like traveling salesmen, they

Art lover Don DeNucci (left) often visits museums in his spare time. Right: Don Leo Jonathan and wife are avid hunters. Below: Dory Funk Sr. astride his favorite horse.

a date waiting for him at the restaurant. Usually, that's the extent of his social life. He can't stay up too late, dissipating, or his work will suffer.

Unless he happens to be in a big city like New York, Chicago or Los Angeles, he will find that all movie houses and night clubs have closed by the time he has finished eating and is ready for some fun. So he has to settle on going for a drive or holding hands in a deserted lobby.

A favorite city of the wrestling fraternity is Montreal, which is happily referred to as an *all-night town*.

"Montreal is really terrific," says Johnny Valentine. "Walk down St. Catherine Street at three in the afternoon or three in the morning—it makes no difference. It's filled with friendly people. And the night clubs never close. A man can



have friends throughout the country, and keep busy just visiting.

"That's part of the joy of being a wrestler," says Red Bastien. "No matter in what town you happen to find yourself, you know people—wonderful people—who treat you like a member of the family. It makes all the bumps and bruises worth suffering through."

Lou Thesz, because of his exhausting schedule, has fit his professional life into a rigid pattern. It is not unusual for him to be wrestling in Florida one night and in Oregon the next.

"My life is like an airline timetable," he says. "If I can catch a late jet out of a city immediately after a bout, I take it. If not, I catch the first one out in the morning. If I

(Continued on Page 50)

running out of oxygen. Still, scuba-diving can be a dangerous sport if you're not careful."

Would you believe that The Destroyer likes to run a sewing machine? It's true. The Destroyer sews all his hoods, with an assist from his lovely wife, Wilma.

For Gorilla Monsoon, nothing is more satisfying than a day at home with his family . . . broiling steak on his porch grill . . . playing with his two-year-old daughter, Valerie . . . and discussing music, art and literature with his pretty wife, Maureen.

Music, art and literature? Gorilla Monsoon? That shouldn't surprise you. The Gorilla is a very knowledgeable man and an exceptionally gracious host—as anyone who has visited his home will tell you.

What do wrestlers do right



Every man to his own taste. For Mark Lewin (above), it's scuba-diving. Gorilla Monsoon (with wife, left) fancies himself a great cook. Miguel Perez (right) is a 'cycle addict.

after finishing a night's work? They'll try to leave the arena as quickly as possible. But rarely will they be able to get away before 11:30 or, more often, midnight.

Even if a wrestler appears in the opening bout, beginning at 8:30, he will still have to wait around to get paid. This is necessary because the promoter cannot pay off until he receives a financial statement from the box office.

When the wrestler finally gets his money and heads for the nearest exit, he usually finds a group of fans waiting to talk with him, slap him on the back and ask for his autograph.

Because the wrestler knows that good public relations are an important part of his business, he'll stay around and chat. But all the while, he's eager to get to the parking lot and zoom off.

The fans will stick to him like glue as he edges toward his car, and when he finally manages his "getaway" it will be with a big sigh of relief.

But where is he headed as his car roars off into the night? To the best restaurant in town, probably. Food is the number one thing on his mind at this point because here it is past midnight and he still hasn't eaten dinner. That's one of the drawbacks of being a wrestler; he can't fill his stomach before he goes into the ring. In fact, the rule is to avoid eating for at least four hours before going to work.

In many cases, our hero has





night outside the arena. At first, I tried to give her the polite brushoff, but she didn't take the hint. Finally, I gave in. She was a beauty, all right—and we had some marvelous times."

Another wrestler, who was big in the Midwest a couple of years ago, couldn't function without topping off an evening with a bottle and a dame.

"That's all I live for," he once said. "I can't wait to get through with my work so that I can line up something for the night."

He didn't have far to look. "After the matches, the broads used to fight among themselves for the privilege of going out with me."

There's an ironic twist to this story. Surfeited with all his one-night stands, this wrestler fell in love with a divorcee with six kids. She didn't want him to wrestle and he meekly agreed to quit. He went into business for himself—selling ice cream at a road stand!

But these stories are the exception. Most wrestlers are staunch family men, like Dickie Steinborn, who married a beauty queen.

Miguel Perez gets his kicks riding a high-powered motorcycle. "It's the greatest fun in the world," he says.

Mark Lewin is a nut on scuba-diving. "I was always fascinated by the undersea world," Mark comments, "but I was afraid of risking my life on a little tank of air.

"A few years ago, I took some lessons and was surprised to find that I no longer feared

Continued



YOU HEAR THE wildest stories about what wrestlers do outside of working hours.

Are they fact—or fiction?

A surprising number of tales are true. Says one manager:

"If the fans knew what their 'heroes' did to relax, they'd be shocked."

A big name wrestler who has earned a notorious reputation for bloodying opponents does social work on the side. He gets no pay for this work. He does it for strictly humanitarian purposes.

"I get a big kick out of helping people," he says. "My wife tells me I'm crazy. 'I wish you'd spend your spare time on me and the kids,' she complains. She just doesn't understand . . ."

Naturally, this wrestler did not want to be identified. "You mention my name," he threatened, "and I'll give you a good going-over. No publicity—*understand?*"

At least, his was a laudable avocation. That's more than you can say about the hangup of another well-known wrestler. He likes to thrash errant motorists.

"All these nuts on the road bug me," he says. "Whenever I catch up with them, I beat 'em to a pulp."

"Something happens to a guy when he gets behind a wheel. He's a pipsqueak, see? But give him a car and he's a tiger."

"He's the guy who always fills in that 'safe space' you leave in front of you . . ."

"He's the guy who always gives you a big blast on the horn

before the light changes to green . . .

"He's the guy who always cuts you off without warning and then zooms off, spitting black clouds of smoke . . ."

"I remember one character who got me so mad I nearly killed him. I was doing 60 in a 50-mile zone. Traffic was light and there was plenty of room for him to pass. But no, he gets on my tail in the middle lane and gives me the horn."

"I slowed down gradually and finally came to a stop—right in the middle of the highway. He came to a stop practically on my bumper."

"I got out of my car and walked back to him. I could see right off that he was a mean S.O.B. He starts giving me a lot of mouth. I listen to him for maybe a minute, without saying anything. Then I stick my paw through his window, grab him around the throat—and squeeze. His eyes nearly popped out."

"I don't know what happened to him. I left him there and took off. But I'll tell you one thing: It'll be a long time before he tailgates again."

Some other wrestlers fall victim to wine, women and song. It's a fatal combination—and the guys who indulge don't last very long in the tough game of wrestling.

"But what the hell," admits a West Coast star, "it's hard to pass up a good time, especially with those beautiful dolls throwing themselves all over you."

"When I was wrestling in San Francisco, one dame made a habit of waiting for me every



Ready to soar into the wild blue yonder is Ray Stevens (right, above). Ray started taking flying lessons in 1962. Soon after, he bought his own plane. Right: Verne Gagne gets his kicks in a speedboat on a lake near his Minneapolis estate. Below: The Destroyer sews his own hoods to make sure he gets a smooth, snug fit. Keeping an eye on him is his wife, Wilma.



Are Those Wild Stories True?

**WHAT DO
WRESTLERS
DO AFTER
WORKING
HOURS...**

TURN PAGE 

"What's the other part?"

"Well, they're working for a big name wrestler, ain't they? That gives 'em something to tell their wives or girlfriends after a hard day's work under my command."

"That must be quite a conversation piece, Bernice. But isn't it tough to get skilled workers today?"

"Sure it is—but I don't have any trouble. Got ten of the best guys in the construction business. And before you make any wisecracks, they prefer to work for me because I'm Bernice LaRue and not just because I pay them more than they could get from other companies."

"I wouldn't doubt your word a minute, Bernice. But don't you find it a bit difficult handling ten men who are crazy about you?"

"Naw! I don't let any of them guys get fresh with me—not on *my* time, anyway. After working hours, it's different. Then let 'em bring on the beer . . . kisses and little friendly pats here and there . . ."

"Sounds like a very cozy arrangement."

"Sure. They treat me like one of the girls—but *never on the job*. I'd kick their teeth in if they tried to get funny with me."

"Do they ever watch your matches?"

"All the time. They even wait for me outside my dressing room. If they don't, I fire them the next day . . ."

"Bernice, I was talking to Jean Lane the other day. She's a very pretty girl, as you know. But she doesn't think much of you. She said she could take



Bernice is making so much money she can afford to fly her own plane. In photo below, she directs her 10-man crew on a construction job.

'If the men don't love me, I just fire them...!'

any man away from you just by crooking her little finger."

"Jealousy. Pure jealousy. All you have to do is compare our figures and you'll have to admit she looks like a sack of potatoes. And if you want to know something, I don't even have to crook my little finger to get the men chasing after me. All I have to do is give a little wiggle."

She ran both hands up her flat midriff and gave her bust a little fluffing.

"You know," she said. "I might turn into another Mae West. Hey! That's just what I am—another Mae West!"

"Who's Mae West?"

"Get lost, sonny. You're outta my league." □





but nothing you could notice, right? The rest of me melted down just fine. Never mind what kind of diet I used. Why should I give all the other fannies *my* secret?

"To make a long story short, inside of six months I dropped 75 pounds . . ."

Bernice ran a hand down her side and over her slender hips. "Look at me now," she said. "Beautiful, huh?"

"You look absolutely terrific, Bernice," I said.

"By the way," I added, "remember what you said last time I saw you—that some day you wouldn't have any trouble getting men? I'll bet they're chasing you all the time now."

"I've got 'em begging,"

Bernice said proudly.

"It must be great for your ego—having all those men begging to take you out."

"I didn't say begging to take me out . . ."

"What did you mean then?"

"I mean I've got 'em begging to work for me."

"Begging to *work* for you?"

"Sure. I own a construction company now—business is so good I've got my own private airplane, too—and all the guys want to work for me."

"Because you look so great, huh? Can't blame 'em."

Bernice fluttered her eyelashes. "Well, that's part of the reason."

Continued



When LaRue weighed a hefty 240 pounds, she had to content herself with staying home and being comforted by her pets. The *NEW* LaRue still plays with her cat and dog but she spends so little time with them that the cat meows loudly and the dog barks furiously every time she leaves the house.



just that . . . I mean . . . look, Bernice, I don't want to hurt your feelings—but you're too big for the seat . . .'

"But that wasn't the reason I decided to take off all that lard and slim down to 165 pounds . . ."

Bernice paused and cocked an eye at me. "Hey," she said, "don't give me that look. With me, 165 pounds IS slim."

"But as I was saying I started getting wise when guys *without* sports cars began to give me that nice, polite 'but I've got to be going' line."

"When I got home, I looked in my mirror and saw Bernice LaRue, 240 pounds of lard. I had to admit I needed a reconstruction job. And all that hair—that had to go, too, with all the bulges."

"So I started taking it off—the *pounds*, boy! At first, I was worried. Would my magnificent bust shrink, too? After all, it had taken me a long time to build that up. I didn't want to lose a piece of valuable property like that."

"Well, I lost a little up here,



When Jean Lane indulged in some illegal activities (above and below), LaRue got even by grabbing both ends of Jean's mouth and trying to tear it apart. Bernice's loss of weight hasn't affected her ability to absorb punishment. Upper right: she hardly flinches as she takes a flying kick to the stomach. Right: She gives Jean a spin before slamming her to mat.



**'Then I took off 75 pounds,'
gloats the NEW LaRue, adding ...**



'MEN LOVE ME NOW!'

"DON'T KID ME, buster," said Bernice LaRue. "You can't tell ME 240 pounds ain't a lotta weight. I oughtta know. I usta weigh 240 pounds myself—and most of it spread sidewise."

Looking almost boyish (pre-hippie era) in her short haircut, Bernice winked knowingly. "I always had a yen for guys with sports cars," she said. "But they'd never invite me out."

"There was this one guy—a big beaut of a man. Stupid, but handsome—and he owned an English Sprite. You know the job I mean? It's so small you need a shoehorn to get into the seat."

"Anyway, I keep hinting and hinting to this big stupid beautiful man to take me out for a spin in his *Sprite*, but he makes out like he's dumber than he is and I get nowhere."

"Finally, I ask him point-

blank: 'How about giving me a ride in that snazzy sports job?'

"He hems and he haws—and I get mad and say: 'What-sa matter? You afraid the car will cave in if I sit in it?'

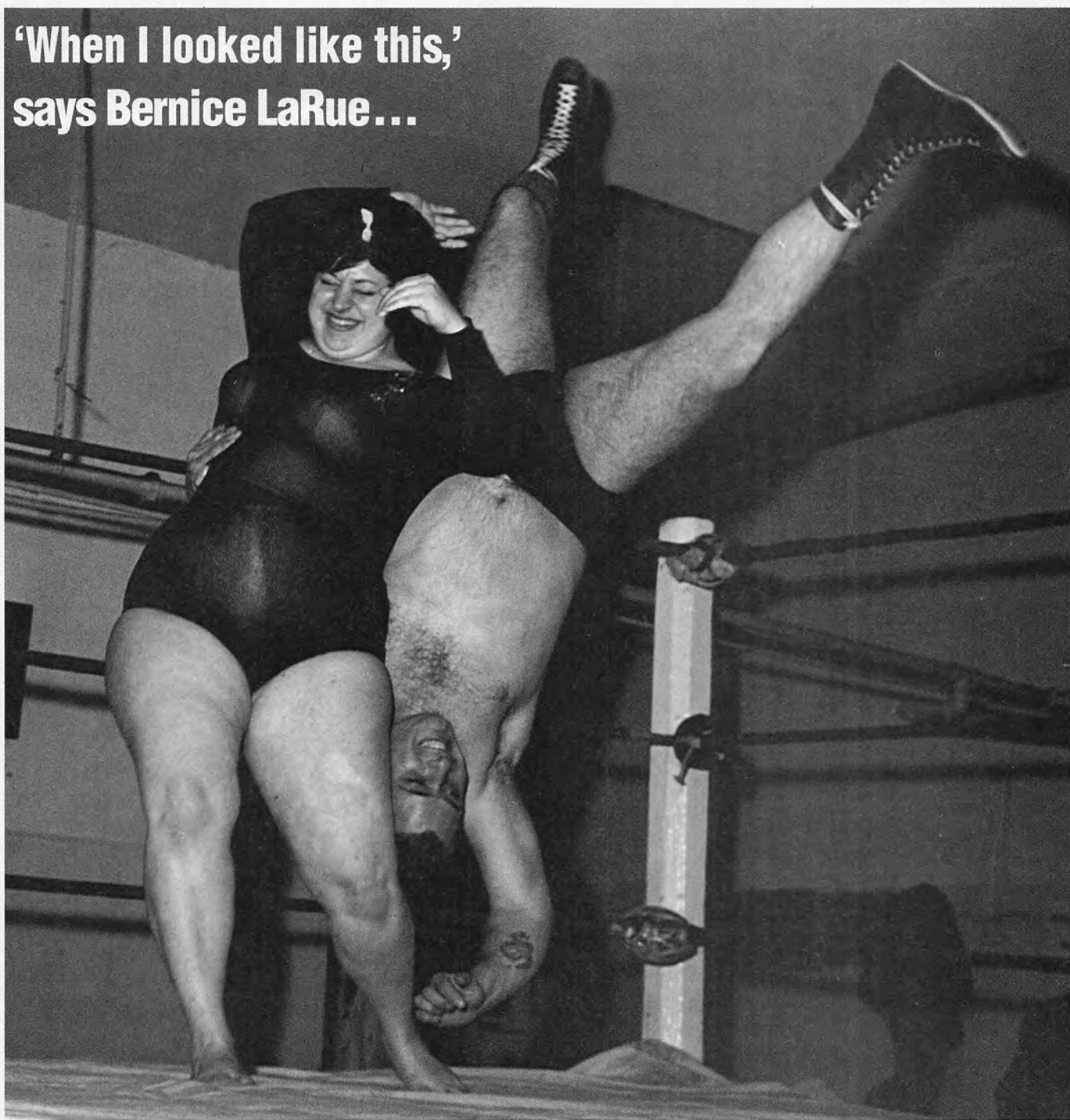
"Oh, no!" he says. 'This is a very sturdy little car. But ...'

"But what . . .?" I snap, glaring up at him.

"Well," he stammers, 'it's

Continued

**'When I looked like this,'
says Bernice LaRue...**



**'I SCARED
MEN AWAY'**

A Note From The Current Publisher

SO MANY THINGS make me feel old. It's nice when I come across something that actually makes me feel young. Putting together this abridged version of the premier issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING* makes me feel *very* young. Not only was I not yet on staff, I wasn't even old enough to be a reader when the issue was published 40 years ago, in 1968.

In the past, we have celebrated magazine milestones in a variety of ways. The most popular by far was when we reproduced the premier edition of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* on its 25th anniversary in September 2004. For the 40th anniversary of *INSIDE WRESTLING*, we have reproduced the cover, three feature stories, the ratings, and even a few pages of advertisements, which we felt helped put the issue in a better time context. (Note: As tempting as it might be, *do not* send \$4 for the Spy-Pen that allows you to see through walls. The company no longer exists.)

Unlike the reprint of the premier edition of *PWI*, we chose not to reproduce the debut issue of *INSIDE WRESTLING* in its entirety. As well as the *PWI* reprint was received by our readers, we were a bit disappointed with the reproduction of the photographs, which were scanned directly from the authentic debut issue. This time around, we chose stories only where we had the original photos in our files. Printed on glossy paper (as opposed to newsprint), they look even crisper than they did 40 years ago.

We did scan the text directly from the original issue because there would be no way to match the old fonts that were used back then. You will see instances where scanning screened text results in a bit of a muddy look, but there was no way to avoid that.

In selecting the feature stories, we tried to give a sampling of what the editorial philosophy was back then. The original publisher/owner, Stanley Weston (whose name for some reason is excluded from the staff box at right), obviously had a thing for the ladies, as there were three features on women in the debut issue. One of them is listed on the original contents page as follow: "Men Love Me Now!" ... Confesses Ex-Fatty Bernice LaRue." (No wonder Stanley didn't want his name listed in the staff box!)

The presence of another women's story was one of the deciding factors in choosing not to reproduce the issue in its entirety. It's five pages of some rather hefty women wrestling naked in an apartment with black squares covering the essential areas of their bodies. Believe me, folks, it's not a pretty sight. But, just think, if you were a reader in 1968, you could have sent away for the Spy-Pen and gotten the same thrill by looking inside your neighbor's house!

Stu Saks

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An Important Message To Every Man And Woman In America Losing His Or Her Hair

If you are troubled by thinning hair, dandruff, itchy scalp, if you fear approaching baldness, read the rest of this statement carefully. It may mean the difference to you between saving your hair and losing the rest of it to eventual baldness.

Baldness is simply a matter of subtraction. When the number of new hairs fail to equal the number of falling hair, you end up minus your head of hair (bald). Why not avoid baldness by preventing unnecessary loss of hair? Why not turn the tide of battle on your head by eliminating needless causes of hair loss and give Nature a chance to grow more hair for you? Many of the country's dermatologists and other foremost hair and scalp specialists believe that seborrhea, a common scalp disorder, causes hair loss. What is seborrhea? It is a bacterial infection of the scalp that can eventually cause permanent damage to the hair follicles. Its visible evidence is "thinning" hair. Its end result is baldness. Its symptoms are dry, itchy scalp, dandruff, oily hair, head scales, and progressive hair loss.

So, if you are beginning to notice that your forehead is getting larger, beginning to notice that there is too much hair on your comb, beginning to be worried about the dry-

ness of your hair, the itchy scalp, the ugly dandruff — these are Nature's Red Flags warning you of impending baldness. Even if you have been losing your hair for some time, don't let seborrhea rob you of the rest of your hair.

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The development of an amazing new hair and scalp medicine called Comate is specifically designed to control seborrhea and stop the hair loss it causes. It offers the opportunity to thousands of men and women losing their hair to bacterial infection to reverse the battle they are now losing on their scalps. By stopping this impediment to normal hair growth, new hairs can grow as Nature intended.

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keratolitic action it dissolves ugly dandruff. By tending to normalize the lubrication of the hair shaft it corrects excessively dry and oily hair. It eliminates head scales and scalp itch.

In short, Comate offers you in a single treatment the best that modern medicine has developed for the preservation of your hair. There is no excuse today except ignorance for any man or woman to neglect seborrhea and pay the penalty of hair loss.

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But don't delay. For the sake of your hair, order Comate today. Nothing — not even Comate — can grow hair from dead follicles. Fill out the coupon now, and take the first step toward a good head of hair again.

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Note To Doctors

Doctors, clinics and hospitals interested in scalp disorders can obtain professional samples and literature on written request.

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"My hair has improved. It used to fall out by handfuls. Comate stopped it from falling out."
—D. M. H., Oklahoma City, Okla.

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—D. W. G., c/o FPO., N. Y.

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—Mrs. R. LeB., Piqua, Ohio

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—C. E. H., N. Richland, Wash.

"My hair was thin at the temples, and all over. Now it looks so much thicker. I can tell it."
—Miss C.T., San Angelo, Tex.

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—R. H., Corona, Cal.

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The Assassin Who Didn't Want to Come to Dinner



SHOULD WRESTLING

BAN BULL CURRY?

THE NIGHT BRUNO PLAYED SECOND FIDDLE



'MEN LOVE ME NOW!'

Says Ex-Fatty Bernice LaRue



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Both D.H. Smith (above) and Super Crazy (below) represent wild cards for their respective brands. Smith, who possesses great potential, has had problems gaining TV time, while Crazy is a sound fit for the hardcore ECW brand.



We've noted it before, but it bears repeating: Shelton Benjamin may be the most underrated and underappreciated wrestler in WWE. We figured he'd at least get a chance to showcase himself with ECW before rejoining one of the two main brands. That never really happened, but let's hope Vickie Guerrero and the other powers-that-

be just let him wrestle and show everyone how good he can be.

It's difficult to gauge WWE's evaluation of Kofi Kingston at this point. His victory over Chris Jericho for the Intercontinental title at Night of Champions was completely unexpected, yet to see him defending against the likes of the all-but-forgotten Charlie Haas in his first few weeks as champion may signal not so much the elevation of Kingston, but rather the devaluation of the Intercontinental title. Still, Kingston strikes us as fresh and just unorthodox enough to be given every opportunity to take a step or two in the direction of the main-event level.

Jamie Noble still has more than enough ability, charisma, and versatility to earn face time pretty much every Monday night. Antagonizing Kane for no apparent reason on his first night on Raw gave us hope that he could be an entertaining antagonist/pest. And Chuck Palumbo still has the size and ring ability to earn a decent push.

BAD NEWS AND WORSE NEWS

Ever hear general managers in sports such as baseball, basketball,

and hockey, when pressed by reporters wondering why they haven't made a deal to try to reverse their struggling teams' fortunes, explain that, "We're not going to make a trade just for the sake of making a trade."

In other words, there's no use making any deal unless it serves a specific purpose and can make the team better in a tangible way.

Well, the rest of the 2008 draft moves, we're sad to report, look a lot like moves made just for the sake of making moves. Maria will look just as lovely on Smackdown as she always did on Raw, and now there's a Divas championship for which she can occasionally contend. Smackdown got the better—but just barely—

in what could be considered a swap of her for Layla, who has quietly settled in with Raw.

Then you get to two men who had been virtually forgotten by fans (and maybe even WWE) of late: Matt Striker, who moves from ECW to Raw, and Big Daddy V, who moves from ECW to Smackdown. They have to be hoping WWE won't be wishing them the best of luck in all their future endeavors anytime soon. Same goes for ECW draftee Super Crazy, who first rose to fame in the old ECW a decade ago and now returns. Unfortunately for him, his old ex-rival Tajiri is long gone from WWE.

Deuce? Think he might miss Domino ... and soon?

Sadly, we don't even expect much from Carlito, who never seems happy in WWE and never seems to be able to hide that when asked. He was shifted from Raw back to Smackdown. Considering his apparently low stature in the company, it was a bit of a surprise that he wasn't buried in the ECW graveyard. WWE as a whole may have been rocked by the 2008 draft, but it's looking like the same old disappointing lower mid-card treatment for this promising Puerto Rican. □

THE 2008 WWE DRAFT: THE RESULTS

(Ranked In Order Of
Importance By Our Staff)

RAW DRAFT PICKS

1. C.M. Punk (from ECW)
2. Batista (from Smackdown)
3. Rey Mysterio Jr. (from Smackdown)
4. Kofi Kingston (from ECW)
5. Kane (from ECW)
6. Michael Cole (from Smackdown)
7. Jamie Noble (from Smackdown)
8. Chuck Palumbo (from Smackdown)
9. Layla (from ECW)
10. Deuce (from Smackdown)
11. Matt Striker (from ECW)

SMACKDOWN DRAFT PICKS

1. Triple-H (from Raw)
2. Jim Ross (from Raw)
3. Ken Kennedy (from Raw)
4. Jeff Hardy (from Raw)
5. Shelton Benjamin (from ECW)
6. Umaga (from Raw)
7. D.H. Smith (from Raw)
8. Brian Kendrick (from Raw)
9. Carlito (from Raw)
10. Maria (from Raw)
11. Big Daddy V (from ECW)
12. Trevor Murdoch (from Raw, since released)

ECW DRAFT PICKS

1. Mark Henry (from Smackdown)
2. Matt Hardy (from Smackdown)
3. Finlay (from Smackdown)
4. Hornswoggle (from Smackdown)
5. Super Crazy (from Raw)

brands last summer) when that seemed almost inevitable. He was never more than a strong mid-carder for Smackdown before, and we're beginning to wonder if that's all he's destined to be.

Revisiting the Jeff Hardy-Triple-H feud seems unlikely given that Triple-H got the best of the last chapter of that battle. Kennedy and Hardy are



The acquisition of Jeff Hardy and Umaga may seem like a boon to the blue brand, but both men have already challenged WWE champ Triple-H on Raw in the recent past. Their arrival will lose impact if Triple-H decides against rehashing these old feuds.

good picks for Smackdown, but they may only serve to add depth to the mid-card ranks. Hey, better to be Jeff than Matt Hardy, right? While it's true Matt should quickly become the top contender to the ECW title, what does that title even mean at this point? And we all might have to endure a series of Matt-Mark Henry matches if he's to win that championship. Is that one on anybody's dream match list? At least Finlay and Hornswoggle are now regulars on Tuesday nights as well. They're good for consistently solid matches and comedy, respectively, wherever they're assigned.

BAD NEWS AND GOOD NEWS

On general principle alone, nobody wants to be on the supplemental draft list. It means you spend most of your time wrestling on the lower half of WWE cards. But for a few at least, this could be a real chance to change that. To do that, however, a wrestler must get a realistic opportunity with his or her new brand. That's not always easily accomplished. Just look at Trevor Murdoch. If he thought he was getting new life on Smackdown with perhaps a shot to really showcase his singing talents, well, forget that.

Within days of moving, he was released outright by WWE.

Fortunately, Smackdown did acquire some talent in the supplemental draft that it could really develop. The biggest unknown of the entire draft—and perhaps on the WWE roster today—is D.H. Smith. He struggled in the few opportunities he earned with Raw, then all but disappeared after being suspended for a violation of WWE's Wellness Policy. The good news is that he's very young, he's talented, and he has tremendous size. The bad news is that he would have fit nicely in a heel stable with another second-generation star in Cody Rhodes and third-generation star Ted DiBiase Jr. That he wasn't included in that alliance and was instead moved to another brand suggests that getting out of Vince McMahon's doghouse won't be so easy for this son of a (British) Bulldog.

It was a good sign for Brian Kendrick that a few weeks after the draft, he appeared on Smackdown with a new bodyguard. He'll apparently at least get a fighting chance to showcase his solo skills. He's talented and quirky enough to be a solid mid-carder for the blue brand.

INSIDE Wrestling

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Since Batista was moved to Raw in the WWE draft, he no longer has to contend with Smackdown GM Vickie Guerrero, who used her position to keep "The Animal" and others from roughing up then-champion Edge.

ANOTHER SWITCHEROO

WWE used the 2005 draft to move the World title to Raw (in the person of John Cena) and the WWE title to Smackdown (in the person of Batista). This year, the titles were in effect switched back. Triple-H took the WWE title with him to Smackdown, and a week after the draft, new Raw draftee C.M. Punk stunned Smackdown's Edge by cashing in his "Money In The Bank" title shot to challenge the "Rated R Superstar" for the World title immediately after Batista pummeled him. Punk won it easily.

These two moves alone did a lot to freshen up the two main WWE brands. With Triple-H moving to Smackdown, and arguably the greatest wrestling broadcaster of all-time, Jim Ross, also moving to the "B" show (Michael Cole was then conveniently drafted to Raw), both champions have new challengers waiting. And maybe the "B" show won't be the "B" show for much longer. Both moves are much bigger gains for Smackdown than they are losses for Raw.

What looked like a *potentially* great pick for Raw when Punk was selected on draft night became a bona fide great pick when he won the World title from Edge. Raw has a fresh, exciting, dynamic young star on top now, and that's fantastic news.

As for ECW, it was actually nice to see Mark Henry drafted. It was probably what motivated him to beat Kane and The Big Show and win the ECW title six nights later at Night of Champions. Kane was, quite frankly, a safe and dull choice to be ECW champion. For all Henry's weaknesses and shortcomings, he's at least something different. Hard to believe it's the first title he has legitimately won in his 12-year WWE career.

BIG NAMES = BIG PICKS?

Although WWE is intentionally vague about just how the draft operates now, it's obvious that only big stars switch brands during the portion of the draft held live on Raw, whereas the lesser stars do their moving in the supplemental draft, the results of which are first revealed a few days later on wwe.com.

During that main part, Raw also gained the services of Rey Mysterio Jr., Batista, and Kane. Smackdown acquired Jeff Hardy, Umaga, and Mr. Kennedy. ECW picked up Matt Hardy. All big names? Yes. All key picks? Not so fast.

If there's any real spring left in his often-repaired knees, Mysterio could make a huge impact on Raw. Mysterio vs. Punk, Shawn Michaels, and Chris Jericho all sound like fresh and exciting matchups.

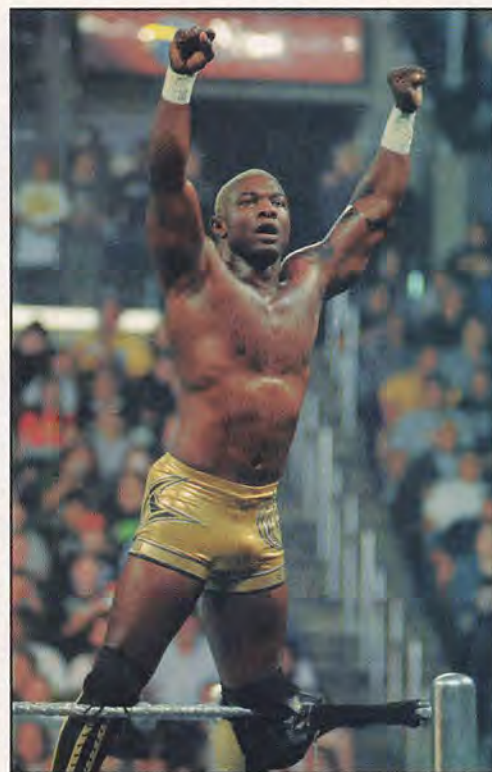
Kane is more interesting as a menacing, unpredictable monster than he was as ECW champion, but barely so. He's wrestled for Raw, he's wrestled for Smackdown, and he's wrestled for ECW, and it seems like he's done a lot for all three ... recently. If there's something that can be done to make Kane seem fresh, we'd love to hear the idea.

Batista had been defending and challenging for the World

title every month on Smackdown seemingly forever. But WWE apparently believes he still has a lot to offer at the top of the card. Hence the move to Raw for him. Within two weeks, he had established himself as the number-one contender to Punk.

Smackdown's other three premium picks—Jeff Hardy, Umaga, and Kennedy—all look promising on the surface and could very well be. However, less than two years ago, Umaga was an unbeaten monster for Raw. In the last few months, it seemed like he couldn't win a match. Switching brands can only help him, but we have to wonder if Smackdown is willing to invest enough in him (at the expense of others) to repair all the damage Raw has done. Umaga is one of the more underrated wrestlers in WWE, but we're not optimistic.

Friday nights will be more exciting with Hardy and Kennedy in that fold, but before getting too excited, we should remember that Kennedy, with all his skills and charisma, somehow didn't become a huge star for Raw during the past year (he switched



Shelton Benjamin's jump to Smackdown may be beneficial to both him and the brand, provided he's given more opportunity to showcase his athleticism than he was on ECW.



SMACK DOWN

By Dave Lenker
Photos by George Napolitano

“CONTROVERSY EQUALS CASH!” Or so opined a rather controversial man named Eric Bischoff.

“It’s all about the money.” Well, that’s what a very rich man named Vincent Kennedy McMahon tells us from time to time.

However, while a big controversy can be good for a very short-term fix, McMahon’s latest attempt to stir up additional interest in all things WWE was a difficult-to-watch and shameless ploy in which he essentially just called up fans and gave them buckets of money. But the key to higher ratings, a bigger buzz, more overall interest, and—ultimately—a better bottom line can be a lot simpler.

Good wrestling, intriguing storylines, drama, a little comedy, some mystery. Those are the things that matter most.

So let’s see here. McMahon starts giving away money via telephone live on Raw and ratings slide a few tenths of a point from the week before. McMahon orders a draft to be held live on Raw and ratings climb back up a few tenths of a point and then some. Think there was a correlation?

Unless you were one of the lucky handful—or knew one of the lucky handful—to get a phone call from Vince, watching the million-dollar giveaways was deathly dull.

But you want excitement from WWE on a Monday night?

You want intrigue, drama, some good wrestling, and maybe a pinch of comedy?

You get it all once a year on draft night. This draft sure gave you a nice payoff, and all it cost was about three hours of your time. You know what happened on June

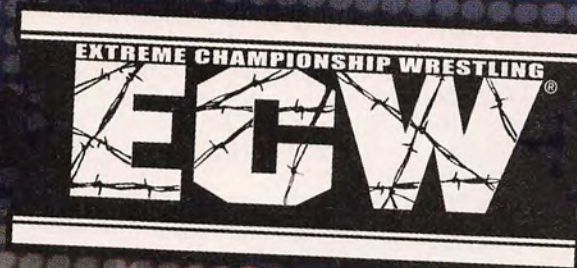
23, but have you considered all the implications and consequences? Which brand made out the best overall? Which wrestlers will benefit the most? Which random selections were the most important of the main draft and the supplemental draft that took place later? We present it all to you here. Let’s get started.

THE HOUSE

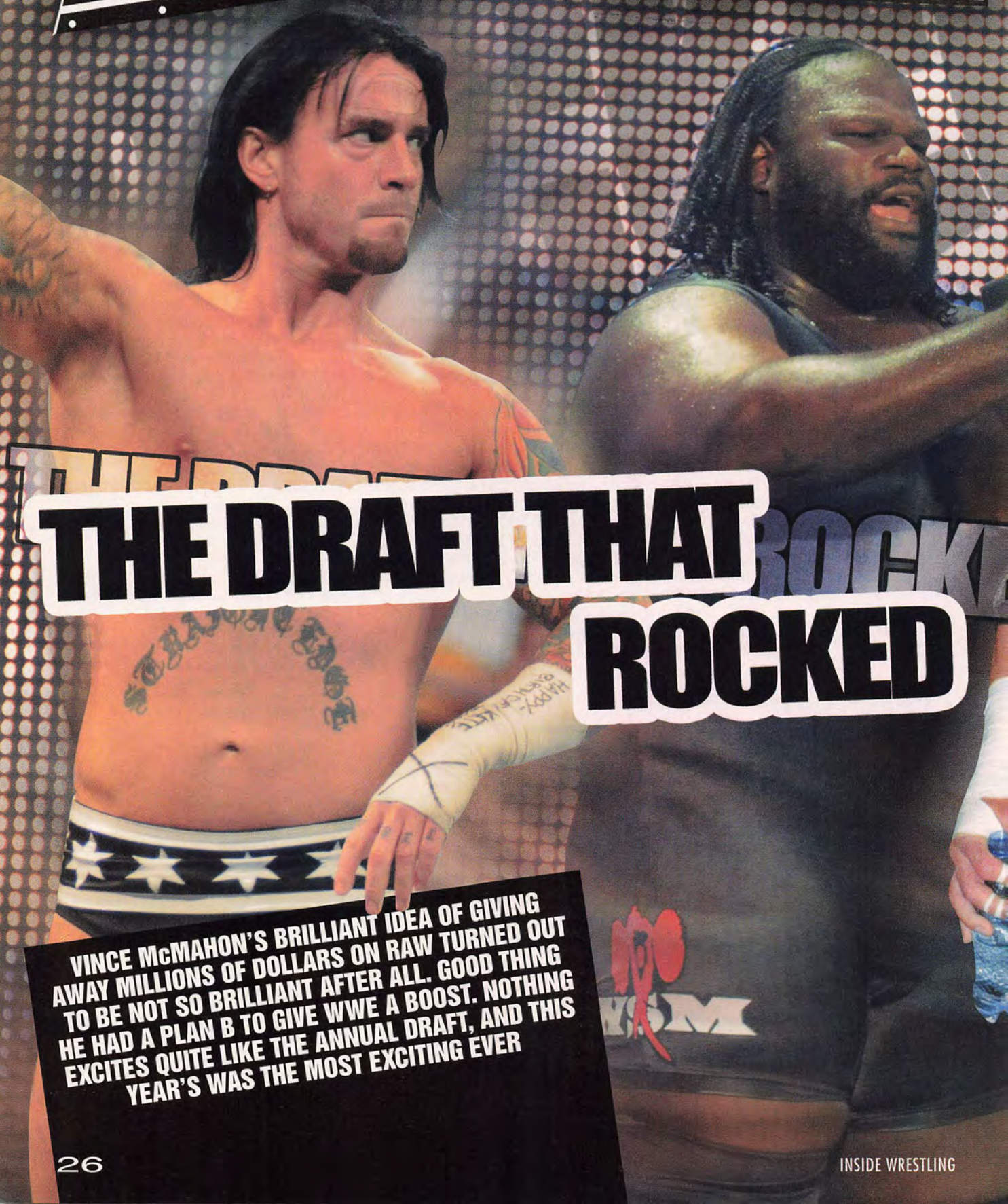
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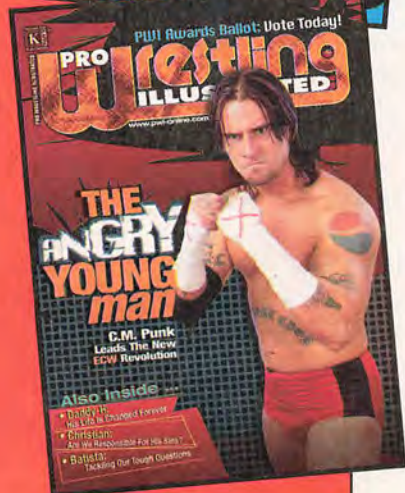
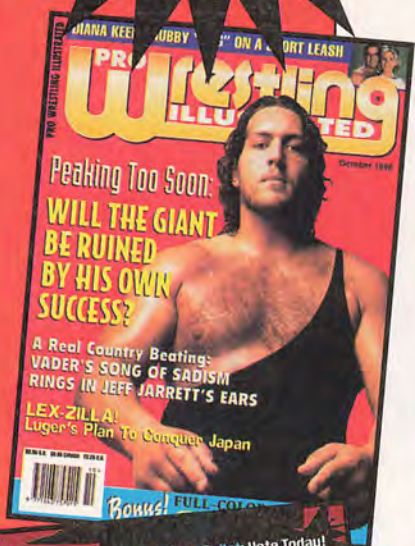
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May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

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May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: The PWI Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll. **Holiday 1999: PWI 500.** Ninth Annual Special.

January 2000: The Millennium Man Mouths Off! An Unforgettable Hour With Chris Jericho! Centerfold: Taz. Plus: Chris Benoit, Sid-Goldberg, Triple-H.

February 2000: The Master Manipulator! How Stone-Cold Controls The WWF. Centerfold: Kane. Plus: Paul Heyman, Hogan-Bret-Sting-Luger.

April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.

July 2000: Call It A Wrap, Jack! You've Done Your Share ... Go Home! Centerfold: Sid Vicious. Plus: Dusty Rhodes, Disco Inferno, DDP, Dudleys-Hardys.

September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.

October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstar The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.

December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

FULL-COLOR BEGINNING WITH HOLIDAY 2000

January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.

March 2001: Hulk Hogan: WWF Fans Want Him Back! Plus: Mike Awesome, Rikishi, Jerry Lynn, Elix Skipper, Triple-H.

allowed his life to become—a soap opera, a spectacle—is something Thesz, Rogers, Gagne, and Sammartino never would have allowed their lives to become. Fritz Von Erich, he's another story. But you'd think Hogan would have a little more self-respect. A little more control over his own family, too. ¶ In his time, Hogan was considered one of the most overrated champions ever, an assessment I was inclined to agree with. Out of his time, Hogan is a fool, his wife is a fool, his son is becoming more foolish by the day, and his daughter ... well, I never thought I'd say I feel sorry for the girl, but I do.

ATLANTA, GA: On May 29, the NWA sent out a press release trumpeting its 60th anniversary show and announcing that Ric Flair would be inducted into the Hall of Fame. A few weeks later, the show, called "60 Years Of Excellence" came and went without an appearance by Flair and no Hall of Fame induction. No announcement. No explanation. No Flair. Which is fine to some extent because in this sport, retirements are about as permanent as politicians' mistresses. For all we know, Flair will come back and wrestle another match. Would I bet on it? Maybe. But there definitely was something strange about the NWA celebrating its 60th anniversary without its biggest name there. ¶ But Jim Cornette was there to announce the Hall of Fame inductees, who included Nikita Koloff, The Iron Sheik, Tommy Rich, and The Midnight Express. Not a bad bunch, but I would've inducted Flair even if he couldn't make it, or wasn't allowed to show up, or whatever. If there's one man who belongs in the NWA Hall of Fame, it's Flair.



RIC FLAIR WITH THE NWA WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

NEW YORK, NY: Got this message from Frank, one of the editors at *Inside Wrestling*, the other day. Went something like, "Hey, Matt, sorry to hear about your health troubles. Hope everything works out okay." Appreciate the sentiment, but in my lifetime, nobody's come up with a way to live forever, so chances are everything isn't going to work out okay. ¶ We all go, and I've seen more so-called immortals come and go than I even want to think about. Yeah, guys like Rogers and

Thesz, who I mentioned earlier. I don't claim to be half as tough as those fellas, although they probably didn't have the advantage of the kinds of things my doctor's been talking about. Radiation seeds and the like. ¶ So, yeah, I'll be okay and, yeah, one day, ol' Matt Brock is going to drop dead. Which means nothing more and nothing less than when that day comes, this magazine is going to have two extra pages to fill. ¶ Maybe that's why Frank sounded so concerned. □

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

SAN ANTONIO, TX: To say that Vince McMahon Sr. must be rolling in his grave could be the understatement of the year. WWE held its sixth draft here tonight, which means they got it wrong the first time and kept on doing it. Of course, this is what happens when there's one dominant federation, all the rest are distant runners-up, and the one dominant federation is trying to make it seem as if there's more than one real federation. To put it in perspective, it's like Wal-Mart claiming that it's in competi-

tion with Sam's Club. ¶Of course, back in the day, the questions always revolved around which wrestler would jump from the NWA to the WWF or the other way around. Remember when Hulk Hogan left the WWF for WCW? Now that was news worthy of flickering across the Times Square ticker. WWE champion Triple-H going to Smackdown and Kane going from ECW to Raw? That's not news. That's what's called "inter-brand switching," which is something wrestling fans never used to have to worry about. ¶The other day, a fellow wrestling scribe who's more Internet savvy than me sent along this definition of the WWE draft from something called Wikipedia: "The World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) Draft, (formerly known as the WWE Draft Lottery) is a process used by said professional wrestling promotion to provide new brand competition and to refreshen its rosters." New brand competition? Is that what passes for wrestling terminology these days? Poor Vince Sr. Poor Lou Thesz. Poor Buddy Rogers. They thought they could rest in peace.

BATON ROUGE, LA: Sitting here in Baton Rouge, watching Edge and Vickie Guerrero reconciling—something I'm supposedly supposed to care about—when the mind wanders to Hulk Hogan and his family problems, something I'm also supposed to care about and, for some reason, do. Don't ask me why. It's not something I'm proud of. It's just the truth. ¶So, Hogan's ex is dating a teenager, Hogan himself isn't much further up the food chain, and their daughter, of all people, is the voice of reason. The son? Let's not even talk about the son. ¶Fact: What Hogan has



HULK & BROOKE HOGAN: SIMPLER TIMES

adopted him and used him as a guinea pig, forcing him to endure years of intense physical exercise and mental training. "My adult mind and superhuman body developed to perfection, the scientists then sent me out into the world to help people everywhere—fighting criminals and improving the world," he said. "I still enjoy both careers. The wrestling took me all over the world, and in the movies, I got to fight famous American movie star bad guys like John Carradine, who was in two of my films, *Enigma Of Death* and *The Vampires*.

Despite the fictitious upbringing, *Mil Mascaras* generated so much interest that Arellano's actual wrestling career skyrocketed. After his Los Angeles debut in 1968, he soon introduced brothers El Sicodelico and Dos Caras to lucha stardom.

"I'd sometimes wear two masks when I came into the ring," recalled Mascaras. "The outer mask I'd throw to the crowd. It had a psychedelic spiral to showcase what the kids were into at that time. When Sicodelico wanted to wrestle, he asked if he could use that mask as his sole character."

The demand throughout the world for the graceful, high-flying Mascaras soared. "Promoters Mike LeBell and Paul Boesch got me started in the U.S., and Baba's office soon wanted me for Japan," Mascaras said. "Later, Dos Caras toured there with me. I still wrestle and do conventions besides one big annual Japan tour with him. It's always special going there."

Mascaras has held numerous singles and tag team titles around the world, and is also known as the man whose presence convinced the New York State Athletic Commission to re-



Photo by Mike Lano

Time has done little to diminish Mascaras' thirst for wrestling and acting. Even at age 66, Mil can muster enough power to hold younger opponents to a stalemate.

verse its years-long ban on masked wrestlers, allowing Mil to wrestle The Spoiler at Madison Square Garden in 1972.

Satoru Sayama (the original Tiger Mask) credits Mascaras for changing the face of wrestling in Japan. "If it weren't for Mil's Japan popularity, there would be no hybrid style—no Liger, no Ultimo Dragon, or Great Sasuke today," he said. His global success also paved the way for colorful luchadores such as Rey Mysterio Jr. and Mistico.

At 66, Mascaras has been as busy as ever adding to that legend, and the grandfather shows no sign of slowing down. Mil's autobiography should be completed soon. He was recently offered a Jakks "WWE Legends" action figure, but as with his other merchandise, wanted to have quality-control rights, and the deal didn't occur.

Staying close with his own children is also paramount to the father

of seven. One of his daughters has a condo in Las Vegas, where he enjoys visiting. "This June my daughters came down to visit me in Mexico City, so it was a special time," Mascaras said.

In 2006, Mascaras was the top honoree at the annual Cauliflower Alley Club. His former rival Dick "The Destroyer" Beyer presented him onstage with his award, saying, "Mil was the best I ever wrestled. He never gave you anything, that rumor's true, but I didn't give him anything back, either. You talk about a shoot or half-shoot, and that's the kind of incredible matches we had in 1973."

With The Rock possibly back in *The Mummy* cinema franchise, Mil fought another Aztec mummy recently in *Mascaras: Resurrection*, and last year was in a live-action-animation series called *Mil Mascaras: Hero*. "I'm like the bunny in the Energizer ads," he said. "I never stop going." □

By Mike Lano

MIL MASCARAS

WHEN A WRESTLER is as internationally popular and revered for as long as Mil Mascaras has been, it can seem as though every detail of his life—personal and professional—has been unearthed.

But just when fans and historians think they know all there is to know about the “Man Of 1,000 Masks,”

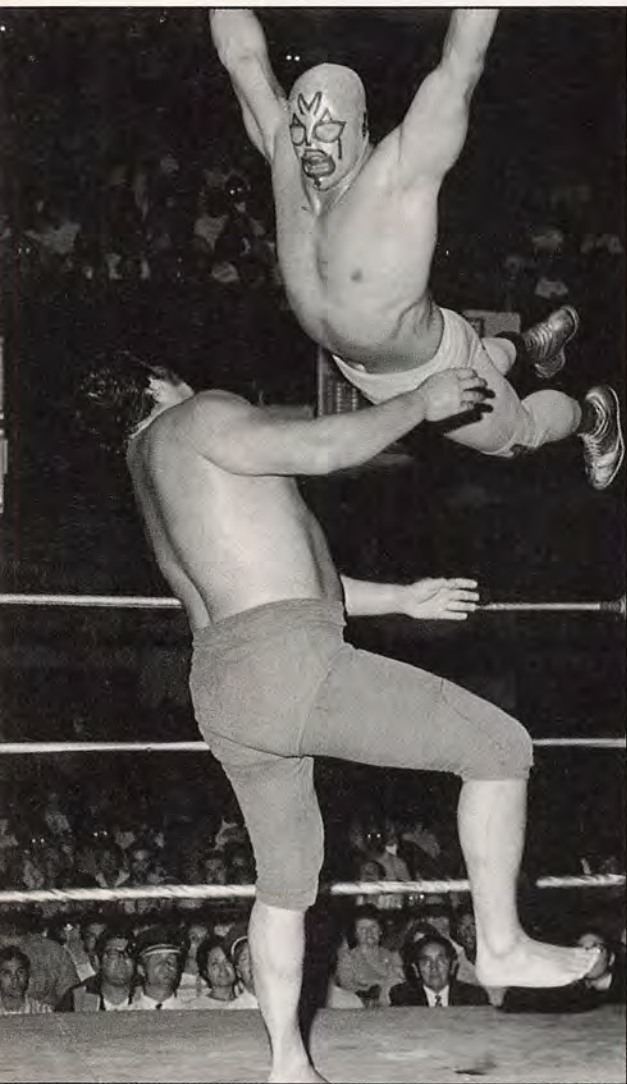
even more facts about this lucha legend come to light.

For example, most people don't know that before Aaron Rodriguez Arellano got the Mil Mascaras job, there were two earlier wannabes who didn't make the grade. Nor are most fans aware that Mascaras still holds the IWA heavyweight and Guatemala ALLL heavyweight belts or that a line of dialogue from his very first movie was repeatedly used in Rob Zombie's album *The Sinister Urge*.

Arellano was born in San Luis Potosi in 1942 and made athletics a significant part of his life at an early age. In 1964, Mexican film producer Enrique Vergara was casting for a new masked superhero to star in his popular wrestling-horror movies when El Santo and Blue Demon suddenly became unavailable. Arellano, who was considered for Mexico's Olympic judo team, decided to try out for the Mascaras role. “Thankfully, I chose [the Mascaras role] instead, and my wrestling career grew from that,” he said. The character became so popular, Mascaras soon started training to become a real luchador. “My movie career continues, with 17 Mexican horror-wrestling-action films, and I've never



The “Man Of 1,000 Masks” was created to fill the role of a movie character, but Mil Mascaras became one of Mexico's biggest luchador stars.



Masa Saito falls victim to the legendary aerial prowess of Mil Mascaras, whose flashy in-ring style paralleled his colorful on-screen character.

stopped wrestling since 1965. It's still my life.”

Stepping into the role was a safe bet for the young man. Mil Mascaras was already a famous character in a popular Mexican movie magazine, like Japanese comic book heroes Tiger Mask and Jushin Liger. Mascaras was also the first wrestling personality created specifically to be a movie star.

His first film, *Mil Mascaras*, showed how Mil became a masked, fighting superhero, who battled monsters and zombies when not wrestling. According to the script, infant Mil was found clutched in his dead mother's arms in battle-torn Europe during World War II, and was sent to an orphanage. A group of scientists



MICKIE JAMES

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JUST A FARM girl from Montpelier, Vermont, at heart, Mickie James grew up with a love of horses and a determination to succeed that always seemed to surpass that of her peers ... Graduated from high school in 1997 and worked as a server at a local bar ... Only contemplated a career in professional wrestling at the urging of a close childhood friend ... Trained with both the KYDA Pro Training School in Virginia and Dory Funk Jr.'s Funkin' Conservatory ... Made her professional debut in 1999 as a valet ... Worked under the name Alexis Laree during the early part of her career ... Managed hardcore icon, and KYDA Pro heavyweight champion, Tommy Dreamer ... Began career as an active wrestler in early-2000 ... Moved on to wrestle for promotions such as Maryland Championship Wrestling and Southern Championship Wrestling ... Won her first wrestling championship of any kind—the SCW diva championship—in a battle royal in 2001 ... Briefly worked with Ring of Honor, although found more action as part of the fledgling TNA ... Competed as part of a lingerie battle royal on a TNA pay-per-view ... Joined Raven's Gathering faction as its first member ... Competed in the inaugural "Clockwork Orange House Of Fun" match with her fellow Gathering cohorts, the only woman to ever do so ... Enjoyed considerable success during her year with TNA ... Earned a try-out and subsequent developmental contract with WWE in late-2003 ...

Reported to Ohio Valley Wrestling in August 2003 ... Continued to compete as Alexis Laree during her time in OVW ... Made her first television appearance for OVW in January 2004 ... Known as much for her looks as her remarkable in-ring ability ... Defeated future fellow WWE Diva Jillian Hall in a match for \$1,000 in late-2004 ... Competed against men in the OVW TV title tournament in mid-2005 ... Defeated Mike Mondo in

while part of the Raw roster ... Affections for Stratus led to unwanted advances that cost her Trish's friendship ... Captured her first-ever WWE women's championship after dominating the heavily favored Stratus throughout their match at WrestleMania 22 in Chicago ... Lost the gold to Lita in August 2006 ... Recaptured the title at Survivor Series 2006 by defeating Lita in her last match as an active competitor ...

Completed her Associate of Arts degree in business administration in 2006 ... Continued to work toward a Bachelor of Arts degree in organizational management ... Was chosen to be the competitor for Trish Stratus' final match on Raw ... Feuded over the women's title with Melina throughout much of early-2007 ... Failed to recapture the gold in the first-ever women's falls-count-anywhere match in WWE history ... Briefly held the title during a recognized change of hands at a house show in Paris, France ... Lost the title



James stripped Lita of her woman's championship and her dignity in the red-haired Diva's final WWE battle at Survivor Series 2006. The perky four-time women's champion is mainly known for her ability, but she is also quite easy on the eyes.

the first round of the tournament before falling to the massive Blaster Lashley in round two ... Accompanied C.M. Punk to the ring for a pre-Raw dark match in 2005 ... Went by the name of Vickie Adams briefly ... Began a vicious feud with Beth Phoenix at the end of 2005 ... Feud was short-lived as Laree was called up to the Raw roster in October 2005 ... Started going by her given name, Mickie James ... Made her television debut as part of a run-in to save her idol Trish Stratus ... Continued making regular appearances for OVW

back to Melina moments later ... Defeated Melina on Raw to become the number-one contender to the women's title in November 2007 ... Could not pull off the upset of the dominant Phoenix at Armageddon 2007 ... Proved that she's most dangerous overseas by winning the title for the fourth time during Raw's tour of London ... Retained the title in a triple-threat match at Judgment Day 2008 ... Caught in compromising and suggestive situations during backstage vignettes with former Raw World champion John Cena. □

worn-out views for one that is completely different.

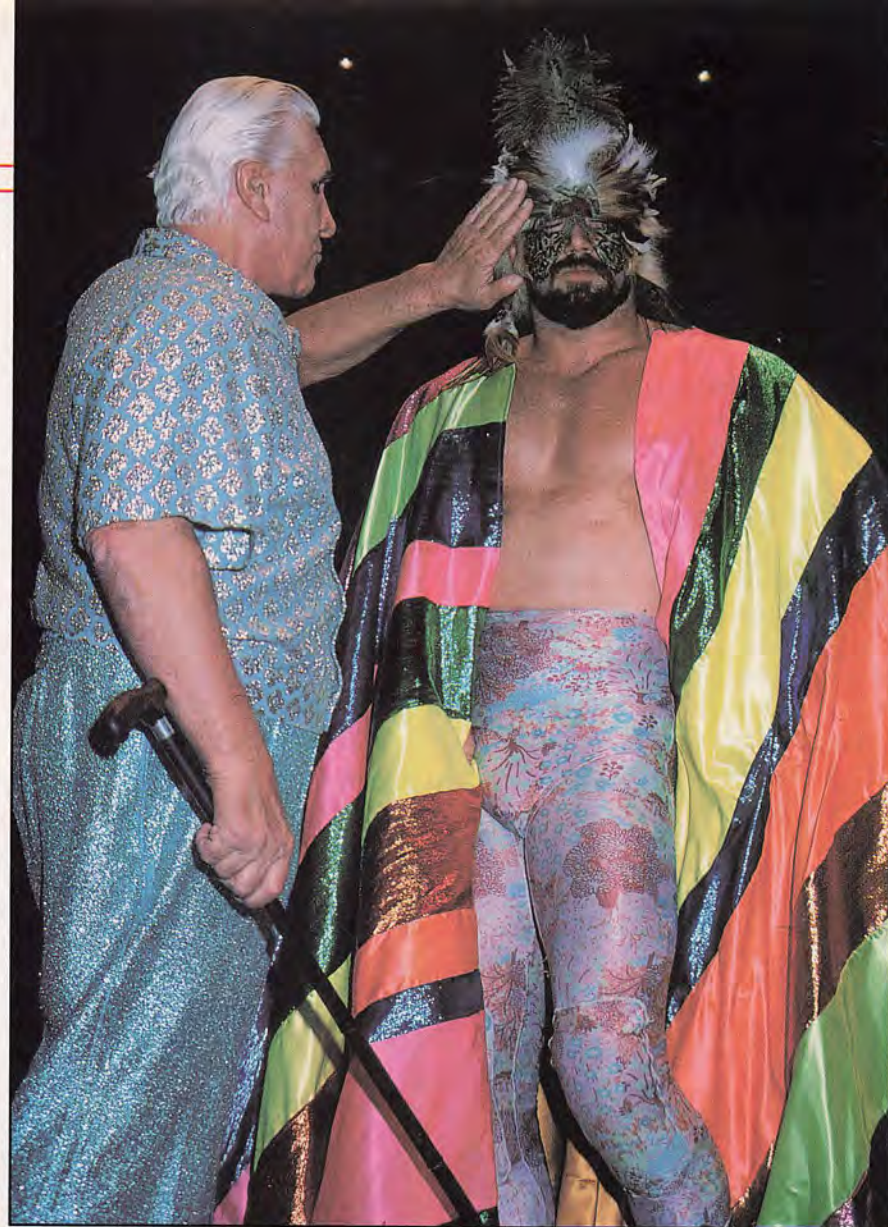
I have no reason not to dream myself. I have little confidence in the U.S. government and even less in the Bush Administration. I've been hoping that someone with even half a brain more than the collective idiots in Washington, D.C., would step up and seize the chance to set everything right. I'm hoping that man will be Jesse.

Jesse had explained his decision to not run for the Senate was based upon his need to protect his family. As governor, the Minnesota media scrutinized his family to death. Some of it may have been legitimate, but it became incessant. There's a line between finding actual news and stalking someone to create news from nothing. The press in Minnesota very often ran right over that line into paparazzi-dom.

Since Ventura is worried about the welfare of his beloved, I would like to point out one little perk of living at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue: The Secret Service. Yep, I'll gladly give up my tax dollars so his family could have a sea of nondescript suits between them and the press.

President Ventura may sound like a long shot, but it's within reach if you think about it. Ventura has massive appeal. That prototypical heel swag-gar that carried him through many matches would work to mesmerize the unwashed masses that can vote. He'd be a tie-dyed injection of charisma into an otherwise bland presidential race this year. There are many of us who would rather have rainbow sherbet than two variations of vanilla.

I can just imagine the tension in the White House briefings as Ventura cuts promos on anyone who doesn't follow his drumbeat. I'm sure he'd



Even in the flamboyant world of professional wrestling, few people stood out like Jesse "The Body" Ventura. The former governor's theatrical presence may be the very trait that would make him an effective President.

sometimes do things that didn't appeal to every American, but he'd at least represent a different approach.

Personally, I'm growing bored of seeing the commercials for John McCain with his military photos. Those commercials run every single program break on the TV channels in my area. It's overkill. Ventura could trump those photos with one 8x10 glossy of him as Blain from *Predator*—all dirty and with some huge gun slung over his shoulder. Which appeals more to younger voters while striking fear in the hearts of those who wish to do us harm? I'm thinking it's the Hollywood PR photo.

The interesting possibilities are endless for his presidential campaign

as well as his term. I can only imagine what would happen! Tie-dyed 'do rags for everyone! Complimentary Cuban cigars for every vote. The big business lobbyists would be chased from Capitol Hill in a fashion akin to the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, Spain. His cabinet could be filled with some of the wildest characters ever seen, from Ric Flair to Vince McMahon. There may even be room for Ron Paul, which would appease the rural voters who demanded change.

So I will make a plea right now. Please, Mr. Ventura, run for President. Your family will be safe and the country will be a better place if you did. □

By Brandi Mankiewicz

HAVE A dream that one day this country could have a President that I can believe in. I'm an angry American who dreams of one day having a President who doesn't follow the status quo—a President who is willing to think outside the box to fix the problems in this country. Since Ron Paul was tossed aside by the Republican party and Pat Paulsen's dead, I've been searching for someone who gives me hope and dares me to dream. I'm here to make my pitch for my candidate: Jesse Ventura.

As I sat watching Larry King trying to interview Ventura, I was hoping to hear the words "I'm running for the

Senate," but it didn't happen. That moment of deflation was quickly followed by a realization that if this intelligent man didn't throw his hat into the secondary ring, he may be setting up something bigger. President Jesse Ventura? Why not? We already had movie star Ronald Reagan in that position. If this country could elect someone who starred next to a chimp in *Bedtime For Bonzo*, then we could elect someone who hung out with Hulk Hogan.

Jesse Ventura has no reason to dream small. He was larger than life for his entire wrestling career. Prancing around the ring draped in feather boas, earrings, and the like

seemed to only add to the larger-than-life persona he was outside of the ring. He was a rock star in a time when simple boots and tights were the norm. He transitioned his bombastic persona from active wrestler to heel commentator just fine. Jesse Ventura set the bar for seemingly outrageous commentary—even though he was just venting an unpopular point of view that often made more sense than the company line.

Speaking beyond company lines has made Jesse Ventura one of most interesting people to watch in politics as well. He blazes his own trail using only a machete and a moral compass forsaking the tired,



Although Jesse's family was a big part of his gubernatorial campaign, Ventura chafed at the level of media attention his loved ones attracted. Is that what precluded his run for Senate, or does Ventura have his sights set on a presidential bid?

For 15 months, he found ways to either win cheaply or not get pinned when the championship was at stake. He got knocked around quite a bit, but he held on to the I-C title.

Marella won that same I-C title in his first televised match in WWE. But even then, oddly enough, when he was an underdog fan favorite, he essentially needed Bobby Lashley to beat Umaga for him. He just recorded the final pin. His reign was a mistake at the time and ended 67 forgettable days later.

And Marella can deliver zingers almost as well as Rock in his prime. Like Rock in his early days as a heel, his acidic tongue and biting sense of humor make it hard to really hate him. He is too entertaining. You're disappointed if you don't get to see him.

In an earlier life, Marella was the young punk student at Ohio Valley Wrestling who essentially got Jim Cornette fired by WWE when he had the nerve to laugh as the supposedly menacing Boogeyman terrorized OVW one night. Cornette slapped him silly for that indiscretion. Soon thereafter, he had himself a developmental contract. Somewhere, I bet Vince McMahon was chuckling.

But back to Marella actually wrestling. Injuries have retarded his progress at times, I know. Still, we really don't know what he can do, which tends to make you believe he really can't do a whole lot. If he could, given the great reaction that he gets week after week, you'd think someone in WWE Creative might think giving him a little bit of credibility as an athlete would make sense. Show that he could theoretically be a threat to a Rey Mysterio Jr. or even an ancient Hacksaw Duggan. Wrestling can be all about perception. Only then his cocky,



Many fans were shocked when former women's champ Beth Phoenix defeated Marella on Raw this past summer. But given Marella's win-loss record at the time, fans should've seen this embarrassment coming.

clueless blowhard persona might suffer. Perhaps that's the fear. The guy rarely gets a pay-per-view match because—as entertaining as he is—pay-per-views are supposed to offer longer matches and pay-offs to developing feuds. Sorry, Santino.

Pay-per-views also represent a major revenue stream for WWE. It'd be a real waste if one of its most entertaining stars couldn't really be counted upon to contribute to that, and right now, he really isn't. If we all love to watch him get his butt kicked by everyone from Hornswoggle to Beth Phoenix on essentially a week-to-week basis, what might happen if WWE does give him something more long term—something with an actual step-by-step buildup?

It's pretty obvious that Marella was never pegged as one of WWE's future megastars the way The Rock, Brock Lesnar, John Cena, and Randy Orton were when they were toiling in front of a few hundred fans at the developmental level years ago. He might not still be in wrestling at all today if not for Cornette and The Boogeyman of all people. But WWE got a very pleasant surprise when it signed him and watched what he became. I think he'll keep me laughing week after week for a while if he just keeps on doing what he's been doing. I just think we might end up with something *really* special if we demand more from Santino ... if WWE demands more from Santino ... and if Santino demands more from himself. □

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With Dave Lenker

IF ONLY SANTINO Marella could wrestle ...

Don't take that rather unusual statement quite so literally now. I know the man knows his way from corner to corner and around the ring, but this was my prevailing thought as I watched Beth Phoenix conjure up the ghost of Chyna, circa 1999, and trounce the obnoxious Italian live on Raw from Raleigh, North Carolina, one sultry night this summer.

Phoenix's victory over Santino shouldn't have shocked anyone. We all should have seen something like this coming when Marella announced that night that he'd issued an open challenge to the entire locker room in an effort to show everyone that his loss to Rey *MAH-stree-oh* seven nights earlier was a fluke. Even the folks in Vegas might have told us that the real fluke would have been a

Marella victory over Phoenix. Take away what ended up being a few meaningless wins as Carlito's partner and try to tell me the last time Santino won a match of any significance.

I can't do it.

And guess what—his star just keeps on rising. He's a winner for losing, so to speak. And this clearly is not a case of being a winner by losing with courage and determination and putting up the good fight. It usually doesn't take all that long to put Marella on his back looking up at the lights. During his short career, he's been mauled by Umaga, humiliated by "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, kicked to the curb (and don't forget pinned, thanks to help from most of the other WWE Divas) by *Playboy* cover girl Maria Kanellis, punked by Snoop Dogg at WrestleMania, embarrassed by Roddy Piper and some clown

named Cousin Sal (of *Jimmy Kimmel Live* fame), and now emasculated by Phoenix. If WWE could pull off a mini-miracle and get Dwayne Johnson's alter-ego to make one of those Raw cameos he'd occasionally make only a few years ago, it'd have to be Santino trudging out to the ring to confront The Rock and ultimately eating a Rock bottom and a people's elbow or two.

Heck, I've lost track of what the man's finisher is simply because I can't remember when I last saw him need one. Remember how we all used to joke that Ric Flair wouldn't know what to do if his opponent didn't get up and slam him off the top turnbuckle every single time he ascended the ropes? If Santino ever had a foe ready to be finished off, he might stand there and wonder, *Okay, what do I do now?*

I'm not sure that Marella has even had what you could classify as a feud in WWE yet. Doesn't a feud have to be somewhat competitive and last more than a few weeks?

And yet he remains one of WWE's most entertaining stars. I see him as kind of a weird mix between the early, ultra-obnoxious Rock and The Honky Tonk Man of 20-plus years ago. HTM played the part of the insufferable but vulnerable champion about as well as it can be played. He was never much of a technical wrestler, but he did hold the Intercontinental title longer than anyone before him or anyone since back in 1987–1988. A big difference between him and Santino is that gold that HTM had around his waist.



Santino Marella is a tremendously entertaining WWE superstar, but getting trounced by the Divas doesn't do much for his credibility in the ring. It's time Marella gets his mat work on par with his speaking skills.

TOMKO

HEIGHT: 6'6"

WEIGHT: 289

HOMETOWN: Jacksonville, FL

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

October 14, 2007—as part of Christian's Coalition, Tomko teams with A.J. Styles to take on Ron Killings and Consequences Creed. Tomko leads his team to victory at Bound for Glory, capturing the TNA World tag team title in the process.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Much of Tomko's style is influenced by Japanese wrestling, as he is a frequent competitor in cards held in the "Land Of The Rising Sun." He is quick, strong, and will mix in various fighting styles and—whenever possible—MMA holds. He has a keen eye and can pick apart opponents' weaknesses.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE:

Every time Tomko appears poised to make a serious move as a singles wrestler or devote time to improving his status in TNA, he takes a side trip with whoever the slimiest opportunist is at the time. The man needs to recognize that, ultimately, there are no shortcuts to success.

PET FINISHER: Chokebomb

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: Tomko showed the first indications of true leadership at Lockdown 2008.

Although his team was not successful in winning its match, Tomko showed that he was able to keep the band of miscreants operating as a team.

OUTLOOK: The man once known as Christian Cage's understudy seems to be poised for a great run. However, aligning himself—once again—with people who do not have his interests at heart can only stunt Tomko's inevitable ascent to TNA glory. This time, those men are Team 3D and Booker T.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS:

"Tomko knows his place in this business, and that's what makes him a great competitor. He's big enough to fight the winnable fights and smart enough to know who has his back."—Kurt Angle



UMAGA

HEIGHT: 6'4"

WEIGHT: 350

HOMETOWN: Samoa

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE:

February 19, 2007—As Mr. McMahon's pick in WM 23's "Battle Of The Billionaires," Umaga rejoices by decimating Jeff Hardy on Raw, capturing his first Intercontinental championship. His reign was short-lived, as less than two months later, Umaga lost the title to "fan" Santino Marella.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: Umaga is extremely agile and quick for a man of his size and is not afraid to take risks. What he lacks in ring acumen, he makes up for with brute strength. When on his game, Umaga can be the most unstoppable force in all of WWE.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: How does one tame the seemingly untamable beast long enough to impart some actual wrestling knowledge to him? It appeared that former manager Armando Estrada had the inside track on how to get the most of out Umaga, but without a clear sense of direction, the big man is extremely one-dimensional.

PET FINISHER: Samoan spike

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: In

January 2007, the "Samoan Bulldozer" got his first shot at WWE gold when he was in the main event at New Year's Revolution. Umaga suffered his first pinfall loss in WWE to then-champ John Cena, smothering Umaga's invincible air.

OUTLOOK: A move to the Smackdown brand in mid-2008 proved to be a suitable change of pace for Umaga. A fresh roster of victims and opportunities should allow Umaga more opportunity to showcase his abilities. He will make waves throughout the end of 2008 and might even capture some gold by year's end.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "You just have to keep going at him if you even want to have a chance. It's amazing how much punishment the man can give out and take."

—Jeff Hardy



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May be seeing more of Brooke soon

From the Getting More Exposure Dept.: *Brooke Knows Best*, the spinoff from the *Hogan Knows Best* reality series, premiered on VH1 on Sunday, July 13. Amid the media hoopla for Brooke's premiere, and **Nancy Grace's** continued coverage of **Nick Hogan's** much-publicized jail stay, there are plenty of Hogan family rumors going around. The latest is that 20-year-old **Brooke Hogan** is seriously considering an offer to pose nude for *Playboy*.

According to *Life & Style* magazine, *Playboy* editors have asked her to consider doing a cover or at least a photo shoot. The plan would be for Brooke to replace the WWE hottie that is traditionally featured just prior to WrestleMania.

Because Brooke appeals to a young demographic, she risks alienating the parents of many young fans if she agrees to the deal. "Hulkster," don't let her do it!

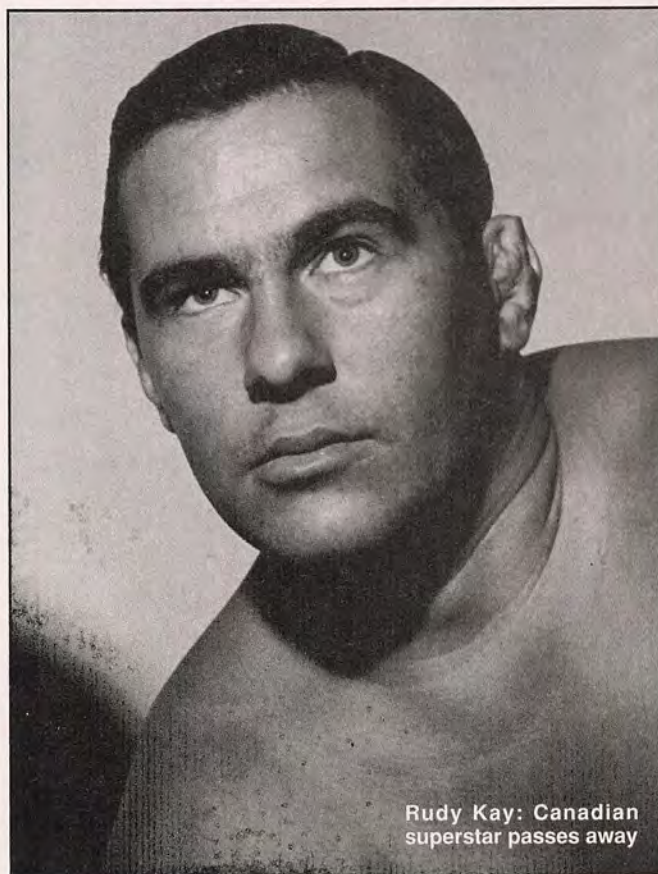
Before we part, I'd like to acknowledge the deaths of several members of the wrestling fraternity since our last issue. They include former Pacific Northwest wrestler **Frenchy Roberre**, former World Class manager **Harold T. Harris**, Stampede referee **Joe Lesperance**, 1960s star **Oni Wiki Wiki**, basketball player-turned-Mid-South wrestler **Jimmy Jackson**, former Mid-Atlantic interviewer **Bill Connell**, Fire Pro Wrestling founder **Steve Szoke**, Canadian star **Rudy Kay**, former Ohio-based wrestler **Chief White Owl**, and **Susan "Pebbles" Adams**, who served as the valet for Georgia star **Chick Donovan** in the 1980s.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, which hits newsstands on September 23.

News from Pro Wrestling Guerrilla: **Chris Hero** defeated **Human Tornado** for the PWG heavyweight title ... Ring of Honor tag champs **Tyler Black** and **Jimmy Jacobs** beat **Roderick Strong** and **El Generico** for the PWG tag team belts. Generico replaced co-champion **Jack Evans** in that match ... Word has it that **Jay Briscoe** was ousted from the California-based promotion because he missed too many dates.

This 'n' that: SHIMMER recently taped 20 matches for its next two DVD releases (Volumes 19 and 20). **Daizee Haze** had to stay on the sidelines due to a rib injury ... Edge has shown his spicy side as a national spokesperson for Slim Jim. Snap into *that*, **Randy Savage** and **Ultimate Warrior**! ... **Randy Orton** and his wife, **Samantha**, recently welcomed their new daughter, **Alanna Marie**, into the world. The former Raw champ is still recovering from a broken collarbone he suffered at the hands of Triple-H at Judgment Day ... **Steve Corino** has signed on to become a booker and talent for the WWC ... **AKIRA**, **Jushin Liger**, **Yuji Nagata**, and **Manabu Nakanishi** defeated **Prince Devitt**, **Hirooki Goto**, **MINORU**, and **Shinsuke Nakamura** in an action-packed eight-man tag team match that headlined New Japan's recent show at the Green Dome Maebashi Sub Arena. **Giant Bernard** and new partner **Rick Fuller** were also on the card.



Rudy Kay: Canadian superstar passes away

As of press time, former Intercontinental and U.S. champ **Lance Storm** was set to appear at a Ring of Honor show in Toronto, the promotion's first event in Canada. He has been enlisted to work with ROH talent and plans to avoid the temptation to make a comeback himself. "You would have to go full-time to go the speed the ROH guys do," Storm told *The Miami Herald*. "I don't want to be the guy riding a name or reputation. If I can't be the best I can be, I don't want to be on the shows. I'll have some role on the show, but I'm just going to sit back and enjoy them wrestling."

Severe knee injuries forced Storm to retire from WWE at the relatively young age of 35 in 2004.

Congratulations go out to **Derek Frazier**, who won the 2008 Shane Shamrock Memorial Cup in Dundalk, Maryland. In the qualifying round, **Claudio Castagnoli** defeated **Delirious**, **Rhett Titus** beat **Mitch Franklin** and **Pelle Primeau** in a three-way match, **Crowbar** defeated **Devon Moore**, **Joey Matthews** beat **Ruckus**, and Frazier beat Primeau, Moore, and Ruckus in a "Last Chance Scramble." Frazier went on to defeat Matthews, Castagnoli, Crowbar, Titus, and 2007 Shamrock Cup



Jay Briscoe: No longer in the guerilla position

STILL BOOKIN'. Despite the mauling that Booker T received from Samoa Joe at Victory Road, he has otherwise seemed incredibly crisp in the ring of late. Booker vowed to retire at age 40, but three years past that mark, he is still going strong. He has been a pioneer for African-Americans in the business, on par with Bobo Brazil and "Sailor" Art Thomas, and he should also be recognized as one of the all-time greats of all races.

CRISS-CROSS, CRISS-CROSS. If Raw is WWE's flagship program, it only makes sense that the World title should be defended on that show. After all, the world is much larger than WWE, and Raw is perceived as being superior to Smackdown, which is where Triple-H now defends the WWE championship. Having trouble keeping this straight? So were we ... until the 2008 draft. That was when HHH and C.M. Punk swapped roster spots. Whether he knew it or not, Vince McMahon brought some much needed resolution to a confusing—and frustrating—heavyweight title scene.

REMEMBERING BRODY. It was ironic that Tony Atlas, perhaps the last person (other than the murderer) to see Brody alive, made a career comeback by becoming the manager of ECW champ Mark Henry only two days before the 20th anniversary of Brody's death. It makes me wonder what role Brody might have had in wrestling these days. And let's not forget the death of Adrian Adonis, who was killed in a car crash on July 4, 1988.

A FOURTH-GENERATION SUPERSTAR?

Randy Orton might have broken his collarbone at exactly the wrong time career-wise, but at least it has given him the opportunity to be home with his new daughter, Alanna Marie. Bob Orton Jr. told me that Randy's wild days were behind him now that he's ascended to fatherhood. Let's hope that is indeed the case. The staff at Inside Wrestling sends Randy and wife Samantha our best wishes.

WWE IS BEST FOR BROOKE. It's obvious that Brooke Hogan is doing everything possible to avoid a wrestling career. How long is her new reality series going to last? Hasn't Nick ruined Brooke's chances of mainstream success? Is she seriously willing to take her clothes off to maintain her celebrity status? Memo to Brooke: Go to WWE, kick Jillian Hall's butt, and assume your role as the Diva you were born to be.

winner **Josh Daniels** in the six-way elimination finale.

Frazier, who returned from a torn ACL and a torn meniscus several months early in order to compete in the tournament, was clearly the hometown favorite. For more details about Frazier's gutsy comeback, check out my "Win, Lose, Or Draw" column in the November 2008

Murdered 20 years ago



"The Stinger" simply offer Joe six months of life counseling, as he did for **Abyss**?

Also of note at Victory Road, **Taylor Wilde** retained the women's championship against **Awesome Kong**. It was enough of an upset when Wilde emerged from the audience to defeat Kong in an open challenge on *Impact*, but it was even more astounding to see her beat Kong without the element of surprise at Victory Road. Move over, **Gail Kim**! I think TNA has another very popular lady in its midst.

In other matches, **Team 3D & Kurt Angle** beat **Christian Cage, Rhino, & A.J. Styles** in a "Full Metal Mayhem" bout ... **Volador Jr.** beat **Daivari, Naruki Doi,** and **Kaz** to win the World X Cup for Team Mexico ... TNA World tag team champions **The Latin American Exchange** defeated **Robert Roode & James Storm** ... **Sonjay Dutt** pinned **Jay Lethal** ... Gail Kim defeated **Angelina Love**.

Booker T made some interesting comments on the Florida-based *Between The Ropes* radio show recently, comparing TNA and WWE. "With TNA, my schedule is a lot more relaxed as far as time off," said the former monarch. "I have a lot more training time, as I'm trying to keep my body intact. I also have more time for training at my wrestling school." Adding that TNA is far less stressful than WWE, Booker said, "With WWE, your life is the road. Your life is wrestling."

One week after Victory Road, **C.M. Punk** and **Triple-**

H retained their world titles at the Great American Bash, held at the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York. Punk and Triple-H sought to establish their dominance in their respective brands in the first WWE pay-per-view following the draft, yet both champions achieved only mixed results.

The World title bout was marred by interference from **Kane**, who threw challenger **Batista** into a steel post and then choke-slammed Punk inside the ring, prompting the referee to declare the match a double-disqualification. The WWE title match was far more absurd, as **Vickie Guerrero's** wedding planner slipped **Edge** the championship belt so he could use it as a weapon against Triple-H. Vickie ran out (so much for the wheelchair) and clotheslined the wedding planner! Then Edge accidentally speared Vickie during the wild catfight that ensued! Triple-H surprised Edge with the pedigree to score the victory.

In what was billed as the third main event, **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **John Cena** in a "New York Parking Lot Brawl." Amid the zaniness, the two combatants used jumper cables, a steering wheel, fire extinguishers, cars, and a forklift against each other. In the end, Layfield escaped an FU attempt and sent Cena through a windshield to score the pinfall. The victory was sweet revenge for JBL, who lost to Cena in a similar "I Quit" match at Judgment Day 2005.

In other bouts at the Great American Bash, **Michelle McCool** defeated **Natalya** to become the first WWE Divas champion ... **Chris Jericho** beat a very, very bloody **Shawn Michaels** when the referee had to stop the match ... ECW champion **Mark Henry** pinned **Tommy Dreamer** in only five minutes when **Colin Delaney** turned against Dreamer (Who hasn't turned against Dreamer?) ... **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Matt Hardy** for the U.S. title, marking the first time the U.S. belt has changed hands at the GAB in the 23-year history of the event ... **Curt Hawkins & Zack Ryder** beat **Finlay & Hornswoggle, Jesse & Festus**, and defending champs **John Morrison & The Miz** to capture the WWE tag team straps.

Many wrestlers and older fans had reason to pause and reflect on July 17, which marked the 20th anniversary of **Bruiser Brody's** murder. He was stabbed to death in a locker room shower stall prior to a WWF event in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. **Jose Gonzales**, who wrestled as **Invader I**, was charged with first-degree murder and later acquitted. The occasion was not lost on **Jim Ross**, who commented on the indomitable Brody (whose real name was Frank Goodish) on his website, jrbbq.com.

"Frank was one of the brightest minds I ever encountered in the wrestling business, but had a bad reputation for being a major problem to deal with for wrestling promoters over the years ... But the Frank Goodish that I knew was a sharp, college-educated athlete who was on his way to becoming a sportswriter before breaking into pro wrestling, and was never anything but a friend to me."

**BAD NIGHT
FOR "THE
BOOK"**



By Harry Burkett

WHEN IS THE TNA World championship not embroiled in controversy? As of press time, **Booker T** was walking around with the World title belt around his waist, TNA Managing Director **Jim Cornette** had confirmed that **Samoa Joe** was the rightful champion, Joe had become so ruthless that he was on the verge of turning heel, and **Sting** blatantly helped Booker in his match against Joe, leaving everyone totally confused. And Cornette is leading all of us to believe that this mess will be all sorted out at the next pay-per-view.

Don't believe it.

The most interesting dynamic heading into Victory Road's main event was the role that the crowd would play. Would the fans at Houston's Reliant Arena rally behind their favorite son, Booker T, or support the red-hot World champion, Samoa Joe? It turned out most fans cheered "The Book," who had been a visible member of the community for nearly two decades.

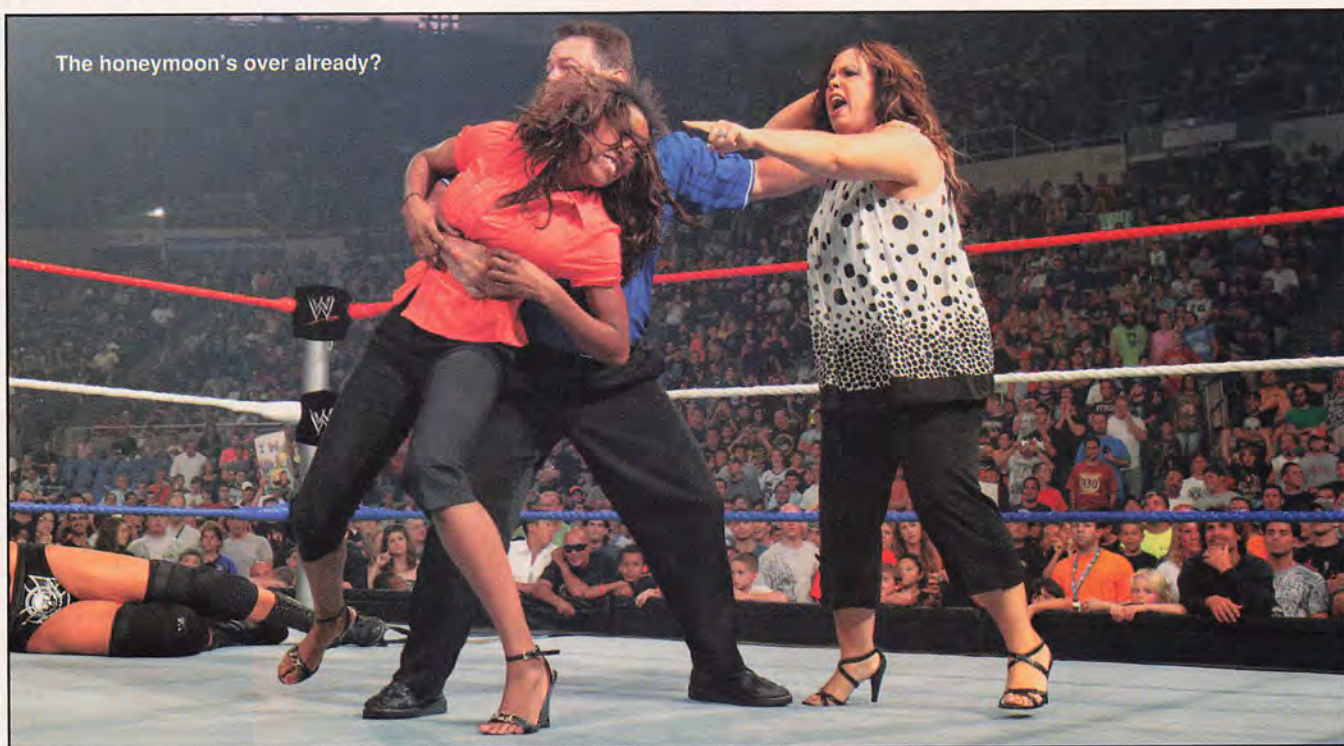
Booker seemed well on his way to, well, a typical Booker T match and perhaps a title victory, flustering Joe with a combination of clotheslines and kicks. The match took a dark turn, however, after Joe caught his challenger with an elbow. Joe seized control, relentlessly pummeling the former Smackdown and WCW World

champion. The beating continued for six straight minutes, with Booker's wife, **Sharmell**, screaming for Joe to stop. Joe responded by slapping Sharmell, hitting her bodyguards who had been stationed at ringside, and bloodying Booker further.

Referees came out, but Joe clotheslined one and DDT'd the other. Two TNA officials tried to talk sense into the champion, but they soon backed down. Joe went on to knock down several members of the security detail. Amid Sharmell's screams, Joe snared Booker in the rear naked choke.

Suddenly, Sting's entrance theme was heard and the lights went out. When the lights came back on, Joe released the near-lifeless Booker and confronted Sting, who tried to be the voice of reason in the situation. When Joe went after Booker, Sting grabbed him and said, "You've made your point." Joe flashed Sting the middle finger and used an expletive. Sting hit Joe with his trademark bat, both in the gut and across the back, enabling a weary Booker to score the pinfall. Sharmell entered the ring and made the unofficial three-count.

So, where do things stand? Booker is as cocky as ever, and Joe has lately gotten on the bad side of a lot of people, including Sting and **Kevin Nash**. Are we about to see a dream match between Joe and Sting, or will





The sky's the limit for Alex Koslov, says reader Boyd Harris of Mobile, Alabama, who recently watched the young Russian compete at an *Impact* taping. Of all the overseas talent on the show, Koslov made the strongest impression.

him. Please, WWE, bring back the "Belfast Brawler"!

GIL LANDY
Philadelphia, PA

KOSLOV COMRADE

I recently attended an *Impact* taping in Orlando and I thought Alex Koslov, who was competing in the "World X Cup" tournament, stole the show. When he first entered the Impact Zone, I thought he would be just another bland product of the old

Soviet machine. Was I ever wrong! Koslov not only showed he was as good in the air as he is on the mat, he even flashed some personality by breaking out the traditional Cosack dance.

All the international wrestlers on the card showed me something that night, but only Koslov stuck out in my mind. I expect nothing but big things from Alex Koslov in the future.

BOYD HARRIS
Mobile, AL □

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sincerely yours

VERY MCCOOL, VINCE

It's not very often I applaud Vince McMahon over what he does for women's wrestling, but I think he deserves a lot of credit for creating the Divas title.

While Michelle McCool, Victoria, and Cherry are all stunning ladies, focusing on their wrestling skills instead of their looks will be a refreshing change of pace. Now we'll finally get a chance to see what Maria and McCool are really made of. There's nothing wrong with showcasing attractive women (as long as it doesn't cross the line of decency), but I'm looking forward to seeing the dog and pony show

on Smackdown balanced with a sense of competition. Good job, Mr. McMahon!

PHYLLIS HALE
Lewiston, ME

ENJOY THE SHOW

Lots of people—including your editors—gripe about the so-called "silliness" of TNA's recent storylines. But I'd like to remind all the nay-sayers of what professional wrestling is supposed to be about—entertainment. Do gimmicks like Super Eric and The Guru strain credulity? Of course, but that's exactly what they're intended to do. If fans want a textbook display of Greco-Roman wrestling, they can watch the Olympics. I think TNA is doing a great job of blending its over-the-top characters with athletic types like Kurt Angle and A.J. Styles. Come on, everybody, lighten up and just enjoy the show!

DAVE ROSENBLUM
Tampa, FL

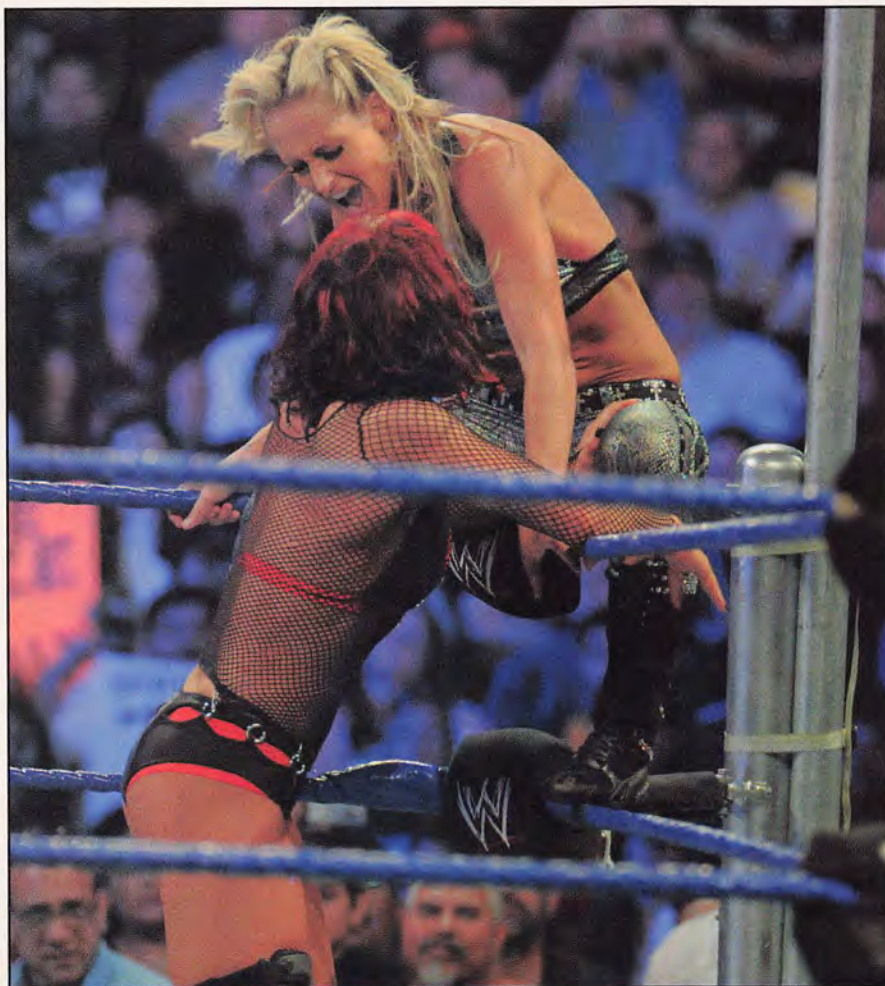
WHERE'S FINLAY?

Finlay has never been what most people would call a superstar. But because of his hard-hitting, two-fisted style, he has always been one of my personal favorites, even going back to his WCW days. That's why I'm saddened to see him turned into a comedy act by WWE.

Finlay has always been a no-nonsense fighter and a man of few words. Most of all, he was very convincing as somebody you wouldn't want to mess with—at least in my opinion. But ever since Hornswoggle was introduced in WWE, we've seen Finlay gradually mellow. Nowadays, he's hugging, skipping with, and singing to the little man. This is a total turn from the character he worked so long and hard to perfect.

WWE had a real diamond in the rough when Finlay arrived, and now this kinder, gentler Finlay is ruining

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Of course, Michelle McCool and Victoria look great. But can they wrestle? Reader Phyllis Hale of Lewiston, Maine, is glad the Smackdown Divas will have a chance to show their wrestling chops by competing for the new Divas championship.

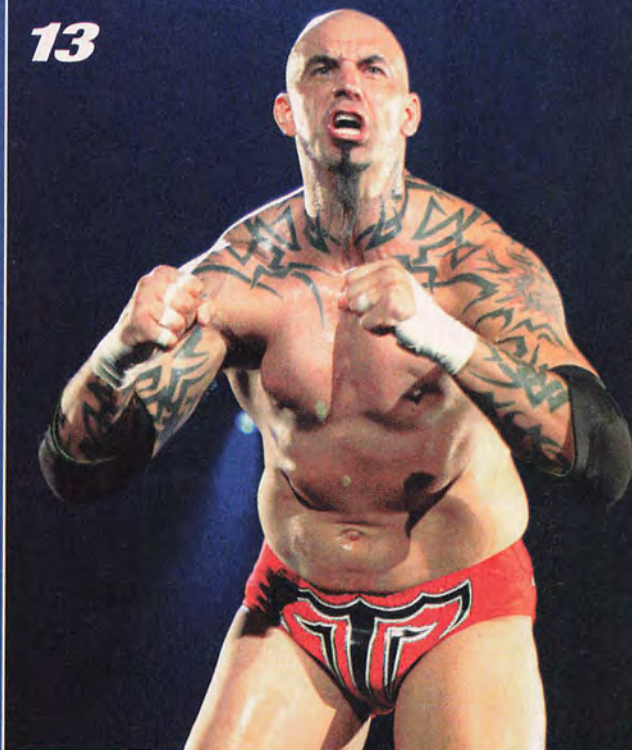
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